Language and Silence
National Bulletin on Liturgy
A review published by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

This Bulletin is primarily pastoral in scope. It is prepared for members of parish liturgy committees, readers, musicians, singers, catechists, teachers, religious, seminarians, clergy, and diocesan liturgical commissions, and for all who are involved in preparing, celebrating, and improving the community's life of worship and prayer.

Editorial commentary in the Bulletin is the responsibility of the editor.

Editor
J. FRANK HENDERSON

Editorial Office:
NATIONAL LITURGICAL OFFICE
90 Parent Avenue (613) 241-9461
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1 extension 276

Business Office:
NOVALIS
P.O. Box 990
Outremont, Quebec
H2V 4S7 (514) 948-1222

Subscriptions:
For one year, excluding 7% GST:
Canada United States International
1-9 copies $14 1-9 copies $16 US (air mail)
10-24 $13 10+ $14 US $25 US
25 + $12

Quantity discount for this issue:
For 50 or more copies to one address, 30% discount.

Publisher:
PUBLICATIONS SERVICE
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
90 Parent Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 7B1

The price of a single issue is now $5.00. Individual copies and back issues must be purchased from the publisher. Customers should add to the price the GST (7%) plus shipping and handing (14% on orders under $9.99 or 8% on orders of $10.00 and over.)

Excerpts from Documents on the Liturgy: Conciliar, Papal and Curial Texts 1963-1979, prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1982), © 1982, ICEL. All rights reserved.

National Bulletin on Liturgy is published by the Publications Service of the CCCB and appears in spring, summer, fall and winter.

National Bulletin on Liturgy, copyright © Concacan Inc., 1994. No part of this Bulletin may be reproduced in any form without the prior written permission of CCCB Publications Service.

International Standard Serial Number:
ISSN 0084-8425

Legal deposit:
National Library, Ottawa, Canada
Second Class Mail:
Registration Number 2994

The Bulletin is printed on recycled paper. This reflects our concern for the environment and the conservation of our natural resources.
In our liturgical celebrations we use verbal language and the language of silence, as well as other modes of expression and communication. This is a crucial time for liturgical language: there are new questions, challenges and opportunities.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Languages of Liturgy</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing the Inexpressible</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language for the Participation of All</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Who Use Liturgical Language</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking to the Holy One</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning, Content and Community</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Art of Translation</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liturgical Prayer as Narrative</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language of Silence</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in the Lectionary</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Notes on the</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature of Silence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen Schuller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Liturgical Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Apostles' Creed</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Languages of Liturgy

Expression and communication: Liturgy is an experience of expression and communication, at least in part. We express our religious faith and our religious self-understanding. We communicate with God, and God with us. We communicate with other members of the liturgical assembly, and they with us. Less directly, we communicate with the world around us, and the world with us.

Language: To think about expression and communication is to raise the question of language, the means we use to express ourselves and to communicate. More and more we appreciate that in our liturgical celebrations we are multilingual – we make use of more than one means of expression and communication. Writers on this subject, however, name the multiple languages of liturgy in different ways.

Three languages: Peter E. Fink writes of three languages of liturgy:
- the reflective language of theology
- the language of song, prayer and proclamation
- the language of space.

He characterizes the first as “declarative in tone, and directly instructional in that its primary intentionality is to impart information.” The second “is evocative and inviting.” “It speaks, not about God, but in direct address to God.”

Four languages: Gilbert Ostdiek considers four basic liturgical languages:
- space
- time
- action
- speech.

Under “action” he includes movement, posture, and gesture, and “the use of liturgical objects,” by which he means symbols and symbolic actions used in liturgical celebrations. Music is included under “speech.”

Other languages: This writer uses the following general categories of liturgical languages:
- musical languages, including such individual elements as rhythm, melody, harmony, and timbre;
- nonverbal languages, including symbol and symbolic action, space (art and environment), time, embodiment, and ministry;
- verbal languages, including scripture, preaching, and a variety of kinds of liturgical texts;
- the language of silence.

1 Peter E. Fink, "Three Languages of Christian Sacraments," Worship 52 (1978) 561-575
Verbal language: It is especially the language of speech and writing and the language of silence that are considered in this issue of the Bulletin. Hereafter, "language" will be used to refer to expression or communication in speech or writing. In our liturgical celebrations we use a variety of kinds of texts; they are spoken and listened to by different members of the assembly, they are used in different contexts, and they are used for a variety of purposes or functions.

A New Era for Liturgical Language

Transition and challenge: This is a crucial time for liturgical language. It is a time of transition, of new challenges and new opportunities. It is a time for reflection, serious thought and study, analysis, critique, prayer, and debate. It is a time to cherish the best language of our long tradition, experiment with new approaches to liturgical language, and look ahead to the needs of the twenty-first century.

Aramaic, Greek and Latin: This is not the first time of transition and challenge in the history of liturgical language, however. The languages of worship used by the earliest Christians of Jerusalem, Judea and Galilee (a relative of Hebrew) and Greek. Soon Greek became more and more important as Christianity moved westward into the cities and towns all along the shores of the Mediterranean. Later, Christians living in the western part of the Roman empire shifted from Greek to Latin for their liturgical celebrations, and Latin remained the main language of liturgy until our own day.

Vernacular languages of western Europe were used in some parts of the liturgy from at least the twelfth century. The general intercessions of the Sunday eucharist, parts of the marriage liturgy, and some texts for the visitation of the sick and dying are examples. The use of vernacular languages in all liturgies, however, was one of the major goals of the sixteenth century Reformers. Now, following Vatican Council II, Roman Catholics as well have shifted to vernacular languages for almost all liturgical celebrations.

Language and culture are intimately related, and the different cultures within which Christians have lived have been reflected in the language of liturgy. The liturgical language of the Greek and Slavic speaking East had its origins in the court and literary circles of Constantinople and the Eastern Roman Empire; it tends to be somewhat flowery, poetic and verbose. In western Europe, Gallican and Visigothic liturgical prayers reflected cultural patterns outside Italy, even when Latin was used. Again, such texts tend to be longer and verbose.

Noble simplicity: In the long term, however, it was the cultural pattern of Rome and central-southern Italy that determined the shape of liturgical language in the Catholic Church for many centuries. The rhetorical habits of Rome set the tone for the prayer of the church. In a famous article written at the turn of the century, Edmund Bishop characterized "the genius of the Roman rite" as "a noble simplicity."  

Human sciences: Today we reflect on language in ways not always known to our ancestors in the faith; we can rely on human sciences that have studied language and communication in great detail. Linguistics is a science of its own, and language is the subject of study by anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers, as well as students of literature.

Communications theory: It should be obvious that verbal communication involves a speaker, a hearer, and a message. Gil Ostdiek summarizes some modern analyses as follows:

The process is actually more complex than that. Current communications theory, attentive to the fact that a process is taking place, has alerted us to three additional elements. The sender (speaker) encodes and transmits the message. The message is carried by some vehicle or channel of transmission. And the receiver (hearer) receives and decodes the message. In this scheme we have: sender, encoding/sending, message, transmitting vehicle, receiving/decoding, and receiver. The message is safeguarded against distorting “noise” in the channel by repeated transmission, called redundancy, and by feedback to check out the accuracy. Language, in this scheme, is the vehicle in which the message is encoded and through which the message is communicated.

This Issue

A complex topic: The field of language and communication, either in itself, or as applied to liturgical texts and speech, is too large and complex to even attempt to consider in depth in a single issue of the Bulletin. Several important aspects of this subject, however, have been chosen for at least cursory treatment. These include the challenge of trying to express religious experience in language, the need for liturgical language to foster the participation of all the members of the assembly, questions regarding the people – ourselves – who use liturgical language today, challenges and issues having to do with language referring to and addressing God, what “meaning” in liturgical language means today, the art of translation, and liturgical prayer as narrative. Finally, we will consider the subject of silence in liturgical celebrations.

Two other articles are related to language as well: one on women in the lectionary, and another on the Book of the Gospels.

Selected Reading

The literature on the subject of verbal language is enormous. Here only a few selected items on biblical and liturgical language are listed. They in turn provide additional references.

* Ostdiek, *Catechesis for Liturgy*, 60-61
Language of the Bible


Liturgical Language


Gracia Grindal, “The Language of Worship and Hymnody: Tone” *Worship* 52 (1978) 509-516


“Language and Metaphor,” *Liturgy* 4 (Spring 1985), entire issue (Washington, DC)


Marjorie Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon 1990)


Gail Ramshaw, *Words Around the Table* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications 1991)

Gail Ramshaw Schmidt, “Lutheran Liturgical Prayer and God as Mother,” *Worship* 52 (1978) 517-541


Geoffrey Wainwright, “A Language in Which We Speak to God,” *Worship* 57 (1983) 309-320


Expressing the Inexpressible

Speaking of Mystery: In the words of our liturgical celebrations we try to name, describe and foster our experience of the Holy One. We are dealing with Mystery — the mystery that is the human person; the mystery that is God; the mystery of our mutual relationship. Furthermore, we try to do this in ways that will satisfy not only individuals, but the entire community — particular liturgical assemblies and the entire church around the world.

Religious experience requires language that is different from that of the newspaper and television, and language that is different from that of science and technology. Even the language of reflective theology — language about God — is a step removed from that of prayer — language addressed to God. The language we need is more closely akin to that of poetry and of artistic expression.

For whole people: Language used to express religious experience in prayer needs to come from and affect our hearts and guts as well as our heads; it needs to be holistic for whole people. It needs as well to be shared by Christian believers, in touch with Tradition, and in tune with today. It needs to unite us and move us to action.

We must make the attempt: Trying to express in human language the inexpressible experience of God's grace is clearly impossible — and yet we try, and we succeed in part. We must try and keep trying, yet we must as well acknowledge our limits and the fact that our religious language will always fall short. We need to be bold, but humble as well.

The Challenges of Vatican II

Liturgical language today is called upon to express and be an instrument of the liturgical reform and renewal begun at Vatican Council II. It needs to conform to and carry out the aims of the conciliar liturgical renewal. The Constitution on the Liturgy' holds up a great vision for liturgy and liturgical language. Our language of liturgical celebration needs to have the following characteristics:

Ecumenical: The Council "desires . . . to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ...". (n. 1)

Evangelistic: The Council "desires . . . to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of humanity into the household of the Church." (n. 1) The liturgy also

1 Quotations from the Constitution on the Liturgy are taken from Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts, prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1982)
"marvelously strengthens" the power of Christians "to preach Christ and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside . . .". (n. 2)

**Paschal:** "Christ the Lord . . . achieved his tasks of redeeming humanity and giving perfect glory to God, principally by the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension, whereby 'dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life.'" (n. 5)

**Trinitarian:** "The liturgy daily builds up those who are within into a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ . . .". (n. 2)

**Sanctifying:** "In the liturgy, by means of signs perceptible to the senses, human sanctification is signified and brought about in ways proper to each of these signs." (n. 8) "The liturgy is the source for achieving in the most effective way possible human sanctification . . .". (n. 10)

**Glorifying:** "The liturgy is the source for achieving in the most effective ways . . . God's glorification." (n. 10)

**Expressive of the multiple modes of Christ's presence:** "Christ is always present in his Church, especially in its liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of his minister . . . but especially under the eucharistic elements. By his power he is present in the sacraments . . . . He is present in his word . . . . He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings . . . .". (n. 7)

**Ecclesial:** "Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations belonging to the Church." (n. 26)

**Eschatological:** "In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims." (n. 8)

**Fruitful:** "Pastors must . . . realize that when the liturgy is celebrated something more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and lawful celebration; it is also their duty to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects." (n. 11)

**Participatory:** "The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy." (n. 14)

**Scriptural:** "In sacred celebrations there is to be more reading from holy Scripture and it is to be more varied and apposite." (n. 35.1)

**Simple and understandable:** "The rites should be marked by a noble simplicity; they should be short, clear, and unencumbered by useless repetitions; they should be within the people's powers of comprehension and as a rule not require much explanation." (n. 34)

**Shared:** "Servers, readers, commentators, and members of the church . . . exercise a genuine liturgical function." (n. 29)

**Instructive:** "Although the liturgy is above all things the worship of the divine majesty, it likewise contains rich instruction for the faithful." (n. 33)
Vernacular: "But since the use of the mother tongue . . . frequently may be of great advantage to the people, the limits of its use may be extended." (n. 36.2)

 Culturally sensitive: "Even in the liturgy the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters that do not affect the faith of the good of the whole community; rather the Church respects and fosters the genius and talents of the various races and peoples." (n. 37)

 Other points could be made as well. However, these quotations from the Constitution on the Liturgy show us that the Council's vision of liturgical renewal raises up many challenges and opportunities vis-à-vis liturgical language.
Language for the Participation of All

The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

Constitution on the Liturgy, n. 14

Unanticipated consequences: At the time it was enunciated in 1963, no one fully appreciated the consequences of the principle of full, active, conscious and fruitful participation in the liturgy by all the baptized. Though greater use of vernacular languages was authorized, Latin was still envisioned as the principle liturgical language; the extent to which the vernacular is used today was not anticipated. The changes in music for the liturgy that have occurred in the last 25 years likewise go beyond what might have been foreseen at the time of the Council. Church architecture and the exercise of liturgical ministries also have undergone unanticipated changes since 1963.

Still on our agenda: The language of our liturgical texts and of scripture as well has also been called to reflect the principle of full participation by all. The church is still wrestling with this issue today.

Language and inclusion: When we focus on the words "by all . . . " and "right and duty . . . " in the conciliar passage quoted above, we raise up issues of the participation of children, persons with disabilities, persons of diverse cultures, of women, and of all who experience marginalization in the church. Language is only part of the issue here; nevertheless, language is one important aspect of the question of full participation.

A right: From the perspective of liturgy, it is the principle of full, active, conscious and fruitful participation that raises the issue of language that we now call inclusive. This is language that includes and does not exclude; that recognizes and does not conceal; that names correctly and does not disguise; that facilitates participation and does not hinder or prevent participation. Inclusive language accepts and promotes the inherent dignity and worth of each person. Taking the Council's statement to its logical conclusion, language that includes all the baptized and facilitates their full participation in liturgical celebrations is not an option or a luxury — it is a right and duty.

Participation of women: Most discussion of inclusive language has to do with language that facilitates the full participation of women.1 This is usually consid-

1 For a broader approach, see Guidelines for Bias-Free Publishing (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. 1977)
Language That Excludes Women

Language is powerful and formative; it is important in how we come to perceive ourselves and other people. It is influential in determining the scope of our religious understanding and practice. The way we are named within the worshipping community and whether we are named at all can affect the way we worship and how we live as religious people.

Men frequently hear themselves addressed in prayer and song. They hear words such as men, sons, brothers, man, mankind, he, his, him. Women are seldom addressed. They rarely hear words like women, daughters, sisters, womankind, she, her, hers. More commonly women are supposed to be included in the male language that was mentioned above: man, mankind, and masculine pronouns.

The church suffers: Addressing women using male language denies women their own identity. It suggests that women are secondary, submissive, invisible, and not truly or fully human. When women are not named specifically they are essentially excluded from full participation in liturgy and the church. This diminishes the church. It is a problem for the whole church, men and women alike.

Generic language: The type of language that uses words like brothers, man, and masculine pronouns for women is called "generic" language. It was intended to include women as well as men, and that idea used to be generally accepted. Studies of the history of language now tell us that:

- The concept of generic language, together with its individual terms, was defined by men; women were never consulted.
- It was based on a view that women are inferior to men and that it is proper for women to be subsumed under men.
- It was a convenience for men who are writing and doing business; in some respects it is also a relatively recent phenomenon. For example, it was only in 1850 that the British Parliament made the generic use of masculine pronouns legal for the sake of commerce.

Language is always changing. There are many new words today, and many old words and grammatical rules have become obsolete. As well, modern English does not have grammatical gender the way French, German and Spanish do. Today more than ever, the gender of someone or something is based on what it looks like; this is called natural gender. Thus if someone or something is female, then feminine pronouns are appropriate; if male, then masculine pronouns; if neither, then neuter pronouns.

Used for men: In ordinary use, much of the language that is said to be generic (man, sons, brothers, mankind, he, his, him) is used primarily for males. It is therefore increasingly exclusive if used for females. For example, the word men on a bathroom door is never inclusive. If you say, "Will the men in this room please stand," only the males will do so.
A long history: Studies of our liturgical traditions show that inclusive language – language that explicitly names women as well as men – has a long history in the church’s liturgical texts. However, in the past the use of this language was occasional and inconsistent. Today we seek to use it widely and consistently.

Unjust and inaccurate: For more and more people today, generic language no longer works; its assumptions are not acceptable. To refer to women using masculine language is seen by many to be unjust and inaccurate. It does not promote their full participation.

Be hospitable: Some people grew up with generic language and have become used to it. As well, some people are not particularly aware of the speed and extent with which our language is changed today; they may resist contemporary changes in language. These people are called to be hospitable and sensitive to those who are offended by generic language and who feel excluded by it. They are called to do what they can to make those who are hurt by exclusive language feel part of the community; they are called to facilitate the full participation of all.

Daughters and sons: Some people who do not object to the use of generic language themselves say that they do not want their daughters and sons to grow up with it.

A side issue: Some people who oppose the use of inclusive language are not so much concerned about this kind of language but about other things that they think some people – especially some feminists – favor. Supporting inclusive language does not mean supporting every opinion that every proponent of inclusive language – or anyone else – holds.

Insensitivity to women: Some people who oppose the use of inclusive language are simply insensitive to the feelings of women, or do not want women to participate fully in the home, society or the church. Some do not care if women feel excluded from full participation in liturgical celebrations because of the language that is used. These people need to reflect on their attitudes in the light of the Gospel.

The Church and Inclusive Language

Inclusive since 1976: Roman Catholic liturgical texts in English have used inclusive language with respect to people since 1976. This followed the 1975 decision by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) to use inclusive language rather than so-called generic language. Texts published


77
since the adoption of inclusive language include such major rites as *Pastoral Care: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and Order of Christian Funerals.*

**Accepted by the church:** The liturgical texts prepared by ICEL have to be adopted by the bishops of each individual country and this decision then has to be confirmed by the Vatican. The adoption and publication of the liturgical books just mentioned shows that the use of inclusive language in place of generic language has been adopted in all parts of the world, and by the principal authorities of the church.

**Statement of principles:** In 1980 ICEL published a new edition of the eucharistic prayers; they had been revised with respect to inclusive language, and a few other revisions had been made as well. A statement of principles regarding inclusive language accompanied these texts.⁴

**The Catholic bishops of Canada** and the United States immediately approved these revised texts, and over the next eight or nine years, the bishops of most of the other English-speaking countries also approved them.

**In Canada:** In 1984 the Catholic bishops of Canada adopted a set of principles regarding women in the church. One of these was that inclusive language should be used in the liturgy and all other communications in the church.⁵

**When Pope John Paul II** came to Canada in 1984, the Canadian bishops asked that he use inclusive language in all his talks in English; he was careful to do this.

**Endorsing inclusive language:** In 1989, bishops who chaired major commissions in the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops published a paper, "To Speak as a Christian Community," endorsing and promoting inclusive language. This was soon followed by a booklet suggesting several workshops on inclusive language for use in the Canadian church.⁶

**All English language publications** of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops now use inclusive language. Inclusive language is one of the principles involved in the preparation of *Catholic Book of Worship III,* to be published in 1994. Inclusive language is also one of the principles involved in the preparation of the *New Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible,* which the Canadian bishops have chosen for the new edition of the Lectionary.

**Suggestions for emendation:** Each year, the *Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy: Liturgical Calendar* includes a section on inclusive language among its pastoral notes. In addition, "suggested changes for collects and prefaces are incorporated where applicable in the notes for Sundays and seasons in [the] calendar;"⁷ these encourage presiders to make published texts more inclusive.

---

⁴ This statement is published in full in "Discriminating in our Words," *National Bulletin on Liturgy,* vol. 18, no. 100 (September-October 1985) 219-228

⁵ This has been published in the same article (see note 2) and in *Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy: Liturgical Calendar 1993-1994* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1993) 66

⁶ *Workshops on Inclusive Language* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1990)

⁷ See note 5
We Who Use
Litururgical Language

What are the characteristics of those who use liturgical language? Who are we? What are our needs with respect to language? What obstacles might make it difficult for us to use liturgical language? How does liturgical language challenge us?

Latin and English

We use English: Most of our liturgical texts originally were written in Latin; the original languages of Scripture were Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Few of us know these languages, and instead we use our vernacular language, English.

Around the world: English is a major language of liturgy for Roman Catholics in eleven countries, and a significant liturgical language in another thirteen countries or regions. Thus the member and associate member countries of ICEL are:


Roughly 70 million Catholics use English as a liturgical language around the globe, with approximately 50 million of these in the United States of America.

Cultural diversity: Today we are beginning to wrestle with questions of cultural diversity not only among the great languages of the world – English, French, Spanish, German, Arabic, Chinese and others – but also within each language as it is spoken and written in different parts of the world.

Different Experiences of Language

Individual members of the worshipping assembly actually experience liturgical texts in somewhat different ways. Thus lay people experience these prayers mostly or exclusively by hearing them. They are not reading them at the same time and their hearing is therefore not reinforced by sight. Priests and bishops, in contrast, not only speak and hear liturgical texts but also see
them with their eyes. Finally, some people, especially those who have a scholarly interest, not only experience prayer texts in the course of liturgical celebrations, but also study them outside the context of worship.

Consciousness of Language

To what extent are worshippers actively conscious of the content and style of the liturgical texts we use?

Good and poor experiences: At the beginning of courses and workshops for lay people, this writer often asks participants to recall a very good experience of liturgy they have had, and a poor or bad experience. They are then invited to tell what they remember of these experiences, and we try to discern the qualities that make a liturgy a good or not so good experience.

Attitudes and use: Most frequently, people are quite conscious of attitudes expressed in language and how language is used. They react positively to texts said prayerfully, not too rapidly, and respectfully. They react negatively to readings done without skill or preparation, and to prayers said without expression, in a harsh or condescending manner, or too fast. They also note the presence or absence of appropriate periods of silence.

Content: Some people are very conscious of generic language and masculine images of God, both of which they feel hinders the prayer of women participants. Other than this, most people do not recall or react to the images and theologies of God, church and humanity that are contained in liturgical prayers. They do not recall what we asked for in prayers of petition, or for what we gave thanks in prayers of thanksgiving. Sometimes they do remember particularly moving general intercessions, but never have they spoken glowingly of a particular opening prayer or eucharistic prayer.

Failure to recall the content of liturgical prayers may have a number of causes. There is the distance in time between the actual liturgical celebration that people remember and the time they report it in class. For what period is it reasonable for people to remember what is said? Many liturgical prayers used today are in fact not very memorable; they do not stick in our minds and hearts very well. As well, it is no longer fashionable to memorize poems or great speeches in school. Listening skills may not be highly developed, and people do not read aloud at home as much as used to be the case. Finally, an increasing number of people participate in the Sunday liturgy on an irregular basis; they may never acquire deep familiarity with liturgical prayers.

The question of recall may also be related to how people experience these prayers, as considered above. Do priests, who experience them visually and through speaking as well as by hearing them, remember content better than do lay people?

Study helps: When printed liturgical prayers are closely studied, whether alone or in the context of a class or adult study group, however, people become actively aware of their content. Unfortunately, liturgical prayers are too rarely used as the basis for religious education or theological study, though our theology says that this should be the case. It is in this setting as well that some are most aware of literary style and beauty of language — or the lack of beauty.
The Language of Daily Life

In daily life: Liturgical language is of course not the only kind of language we use. We cannot help coming to liturgical celebrations, therefore, with the language of daily life in our ears. Our nonliturgical experiences of language inevitably will influence our approach to liturgical language and our ability to enter into it as prayer. What are some of the characteristics of the language of our daily lives?

The visual dimension: We live in an era of television and movies, where the visual accompanies spoken language; the visual may even be the more dominant factor in communication. The Catholic liturgy has an important visual component; however, this is not as dynamic and colorful as that of television.

Too many words: As well, today we are inundated with many words. How can we possibly listen carefully to all of them? When considering how people react to liturgical language, we need to see as well how they remember and react to other kinds of language. How well do they remember what is in the newspapers and magazines they read; to what extent do they recall what characters in movies and television programs actually say? When there are too many words in the environment, we may simply stop listening; it then may be difficult to start listening carefully when this becomes important.

Literacy: An increasing number of people in our society are said to be functionally illiterate; they cannot read at all or only at an elementary level. Such persons may in fact be more sensitive to spoken language than those who are literate; however, their general level of education may be less.

Challenges of Liturgical Language

The specialized character of some liturgical language may make it difficult for some to understand and enter into. For example, liturgical prayers utilize a specialized language of Christian prayer and theology. Words have meanings or nuances within the Christian community that may not be meant in other contexts.

Languages of groups: This in itself should not be taken as a criticism of liturgical language. Every group of persons, whether teenagers, parents, secretaries, carpenters, musicians, lawyers, skiers, uses a specialized language. This may be used for precision, to save time, to preserve secrecy, or to provide group identity. The church does the same. What is important in this regard, however, is to be conscientious in teaching the specialized language of the church to all members; sometimes this is not done well enough.

Level of language: One of the questions with which liturgists wrestle has to do with the “level” of language. Should we use a colloquial level of language, the kind of speech exchanged in everyday conversation; the kind of language found in many movies and television programs? Or should it be a very high and esoteric language, one reserved for worship and religious expression? Or
should the level be that of educated persons and good contemporary literature? Our present liturgical texts are intended to use the last named level of language.

**Theological questions:** The question of level of language is much debated, and it has implications that go far beyond language itself. For example, language that is used only for worship ("sacral" language) conveys a message about our understanding of God. The transcendence – otherness – of God will be emphasized by this kind of language; God's immanence and incarnation will tend to be neglected. Language that is too far from ordinary people also says something about the church and its ordained ministers. It will convey the message that ordinary people are not intended to participate fully in the liturgy and hence in other aspects of church life as well. Full participation, instead, is for those who are educated – historically, the clergy. Language that is too high also implies a need for mediators between God and the people, again over emphasizing the importance of the clergy.

---

**Other Considerations**

**Roman roots:** We are increasingly aware of the influence of each cultural system on language – not just vocabulary but also deeper aspects of communication. In the past – and even at present – we have accepted a style of communication for liturgical prayer that arose in ancient Rome but has been extended around the world through the movements of peoples and the ministry of evangelization.¹

**Canadian use:** Today we might ask if this Roman style is really the most appropriate for us today, in our North American, Canadian culture. But if we would wish to inculturate liturgical language for Canadian use, we would need to ask what characterizes Canadian culture, and what language of prayer might best reflect and express this culture? And is there only a single Canadian culture, even for Anglophones? Is a single approach to liturgical prayer in English really appropriate for our society? These are complex issues, still under discussion.

**Unity, uniformity and pluralism:** Questions about culture also raise questions about unity in the church. To what extent has unity been identified with uniformity; to what extent does unity need to be expressed by uniformity in language? If there is increasing recognition of pluralism and cultural diversity, what needs to be done to maintain unity in the church? Clearly, these are difficult questions as well.

**Individual differences:** There is a growing literature on the subject of gender differences in communication styles.\(^2\) There is increasing awareness as well of individual differences in communication; for example, learning style inventories, the Myers-Briggs personality type indicator, the enneagram, and other similar approaches are in wide use.\(^3\) What implications might these have for liturgical language, if at all?

**Patience needed:** Liturgical language does not cater to the prevalent cultural attitude and expectation of "instant gratification." Rather, in liturgical celebration we are called to an attitude of patience: we do not even try to say everything there is to say in a single liturgical prayer or in a single celebration. There is always more to say, some of which is left to another prayer or another occasion; some things are left unsaid. Do we have the patience to wait, to be satisfied with saying what we need to say over the course of a year or more, or even a lifetime?

**Language as scapegoat:** Finally, in some circles liturgical language is criticized not for its own sake, but as a scapegoat.\(^4\) That is, some criticism of contemporary liturgical texts is really focused on other issues; though language is blamed and condemned, the real problems for these people lie elsewhere.

**Most often,** it is dislike of the reforms and renewal initiated by Vatican Council II; it is reaction to changes in church and society; it is discomfort with new roles of women in church and society. Condemnation of some liturgical language is really part of the backlash against contemporary changes: changes in church, in the role of laity and clergy, increasing pluralism in society, different roles and relationships of women and men and struggles around these issues, the post-Christian character of society. Liturgical language, however, takes the blame.

---

\(^2\) See the bibliography in Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (New York: Ballantine Books 1990) 310-319

\(^3\) A number of works have now been published on spirituality in relation to the Myers-Briggs and enneagram categories. See also Eric M. Holleyman, *The Impact of Personality on Preaching: An Investigation of the Correlation Between Myers-Briggs Personality Types and the Preaching Experience* (Ph. D. Dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary 1991)

\(^4\) This is also analyzed by Nathan Mitchell, "The Amen Corner," *Worship* 68 (March 1994) 157-164
Speaking to the Holy One

No human language is adequate to describe or address God. God is not a human being; God is not made by us. Rather, God is Other, God is Mystery. For centuries and still today, theologians and philosophers study and debate the question: How can we speak about God? How is God to be named and described? Can we do this at all? Should we even try?

We have to speak: The liturgical question is somewhat different: How can we speak to God? How is God to be addressed by believers who live in covenant relationship with God? Despite the fact that we know intellectually that our human language is inadequate to the task, yet human language is all we have. We are compelled to speak to God.

We take a risk: It is difficult to be fully aware of the risks we take and the distance we are trying to bridge when we use human language to address God. In liturgical prayer we put language about God and language about ourselves or creation in close proximity, for example the phrase “God and humankind.” We do know a lot about “humankind;” it is close to our everyday experience. Simply to use the word “God” in the same phrase can easily tempt us into thinking that we also know a lot about God; that we know God in the same way or to the same extent that we know about “humankind.” This however is simply not the case.

Possible idolatry: To take our language about God too literally or too seriously in the wrong way is to be tempted to a kind of idolatry. This is also the case if our language about God is too narrow or limiting. God is beyond all measure and beyond all human description. And yet we do need to address God in our liturgical celebrations; we do need to take language addressed to God seriously. What are we to do?

Eastern Christians sometimes use a negative (apophatic) approach to language about God in liturgical prayer. In the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, for example, there are prayers like these:

O Lord our God,
whose might is ineffable,
whose glory is inconceivable,
whose mercy is infinite,
and whose love toward mankind is unutterable . . . .

. . . thou art God
ineffable, incomprehensible, invisible, inconceivable;
Thou art from everlasting and art changeless . . . .

[God] . . . who art from everlasting,
invisible, inscrutable, ineffable, immutable . . . .

1 Isabel Florence Hapgood, Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church, 6th edition (Englewood NJ: Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese 1983) pages 81 and 101
Poetic images: Another approach is to use rich, even extravagant and imaginative poetic images. This tends to be done more in hymns, religious poetry, private prayer and popular devotion than in liturgical prayer, at least in western Christianity. In addition, it tends to be applied more to Jesus Christ and his mother than to God the First Person of the Trinity. Nevertheless, this invocation to Christ by Pope Damasus (366-384 A.D.) is too fine not to quote:


Christ Jesus is everything.2

God’s names: Our liturgical language addresses God using what we usually call "names" – God, Lord, Father and combinations of these. In fact, these are not personal names at all; they are however what we do call God. In the course of Christian history the relative frequency with which each has been used in liturgical prayer has varied somewhat; the way in which they have been used has also varied. In liturgical books from the early middle ages, God was sometimes also named Creator, Most High, King, and Holy One; occasional prayers had no address except an implicit "you."

Attributes: In addition, we surround the divine names with attributes and qualities of God, such as "merciful" and "eternal." These are most commonly used as adjectives ("almighty God"), in prepositional constructions ("God of heaven and earth"), and in constructions using "our" ("God our comforter"). Finally, attributes and qualities are sometimes used as appositives, for example "God, protector of all who hope in you."

The present Sacramentary includes the following attitudes and qualities in the addresses of its prayers:

- God is all-powerful (or almighty), creator, eternal (or ever-living), ever-present, holy, unchanging and unseen.
- God is our guide, light, protector, redeemer, saviour, shepherd, source of blessings, and source of light.
- God is a God of comfort, compassion, consolation, freedom, goodness, holiness, life, light, love, peace, providence, truth, and wisdom.
- God is the Father in heaven, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of the lowly, Father of all, God of all gifts, God of our fathers, and God of the living and the dead.

Only three of these attributes – all-powerful, eternal, merciful – are actually used very frequently. Many of the others are used only once, and many of them are not used in Sunday prayers.3

2 In Lucien Deiss, Springtime of the Liturgy: Liturgical Texts of the First Four Centuries (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1979) 258-259
Questions and Consequences

Where do our prayer-addresses come from? What are their origins? What historical and contemporary questions arise regarding the language we use to address God in liturgical prayer? What difference does the language of address make for our Christian lives and the life of the church?

Biblical: The “names” themselves are biblical in origin, though we may or may not be fully aware of their range of biblical nuances. In English translations of the bible, LORD – all capitals – is often used to render the sacred, unpronounced divine name; this reflects the Jewish practice of speaking Adonai – Lord – in place of the divine name. “Lord” in the bible is also a title for rulers and indeed, any male.

God and Christ: When “Lord” is used at the beginning of a liturgical prayer, it refers to the First Person of the Trinity; when used in the conclusion, it refers to Jesus Christ. This duality of use is theologically intentional; is it properly understood by all members of the worshipping assembly?

Various origins: The attributes and qualities of God that are included in liturgical prayers have a variety of origins. Some indeed are biblical, but others come from Roman religion and culture, theological reflection and even philosophy. The range of attributes used in liturgical prayer certainly omits many biblical images of God: why is this the case? Why are only three attributes – almighty, eternal, merciful – so dominant in our liturgical prayer? Why are others so infrequently used?

Many questions arise today about the language about God and language addressed to God in our liturgical prayers. Does our language adequately respect the breadth of the church’s appreciation of God? Does it appropriately balance the many aspects of God’s nature and our experience of God’s presence? Briefly, here are some of the issues that are being discussed today:

Many-few: At a general level, we may ask if a wide range of names and attributes of God ought to be used in liturgical prayer, or only a few?

Biblical-postbiblical: Should a wider range of biblical images of God be used? At the present time many inanimate, animal, anthropomorphic and female images of God that are found in scripture are not used in liturgical prayer.

Personal-impersonal: Does our liturgical language clearly convey the experience that God is personal? Or does God seem impersonal?

Transcendent-immanent: What balance between transcendence and immanence does our liturgical language present? Has the increased appreciation of God’s immanence in other aspects of the contemporary liturgical renewal been reflected adequately in the language of prayer?

Outside-inside: Traditional language has tended to emphasize the fact that God is outside us and outside the world. Should this not be balanced by language that tells us that God is also in us and in the world (though of course not identified with us or the world)?
Up-down: Some images of God give the impression that God is up in the sky somewhere; some people's idea of heaven corresponds with this view. Does our liturgical language take modern cosmology into account? Does it convey an appreciation that God is close to us as well?

Caring-impassive: Does our language express our appreciation that God cares for us and for all creation? In this context some speak of God as being "passionate." Some traditional language of prayer, based more on neoplatonic philosophy than our biblical heritage, spoke of God as impassive and unchanging. Does God weep? Is this apparent in our liturgical language?

Static-active: Again, dependence on neoplatonic philosophy seemed to require that God be imaged as relatively static. In contrast, scripture sees God as intensely active. How does our liturgical language deal with this question?

Male-female: Despite the fact that theology says that God is neither male or female, we use male images of God and masculine pronouns in our liturgical prayer, and some people really do believe that God is male. Should our language of prayer be gender-neutral, or should we balance male/masculine language with female images that are found, for example, in the bible?

Powerful-powerless: What do we mean when we call God "almighty?" If God really were all-powerful, would God not prevent the violence and disaster that surrounds us? Does the freedom that God gives us not render God powerless in a certain sense? Should this not also be conveyed in our liturgical language?

Present-future: Is this life important; is our life now a time for the exercise of Christian ministry and the acceptance of responsibility to work for the advent of God's reign? Or is this life simply a "veil of tears," a time to endure while we wait for the life that is more important, that of heaven? What balance between present life and after-life does our liturgical language strike? Is it the best balance?

Empowering-disempowering: Does our liturgical language give the idea that we are active, responsible, co-creators with God, continuing the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world today? Or does it say that we are passive, without power, without responsibility? Is our language empowering or does it take away or deny the power that comes from life in the Spirit of God?

What consequences: Questions are also being raised regarding the consequences of our language about and to God for ourselves, the community of the church, and even for society at large. For example, is humanity blessed, redeemed, or fallen: where is the emphasis? Are males dominant and females subservient, or is mutuality fostered? Are clergy dominant and laity subservient, or again, is mutuality fostered? Is our language prophetic and challenging, or does it support the status quo in society? Is the world bad, or fundamentally good? Does our language convey a message of hope, of the potential for transformation, or not?

There is much to think about.
But in order that the liturgy may possess its full effectiveness, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, and that they cooperate with divine grace, lest they receive it in vain. Pastors must therefore realize that when the liturgy is celebrated something more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and lawful celebration; it is also their duty to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects. (n. 11)

In this reform both texts and rites should be so drawn up that they express more clearly the holy things they signify and that the Christian people, as far as possible, are able to understand them with ease and to take part in the rites fully, actively, and as befits a community. (n. 21)

The rites should be marked by a noble simplicity; they should be short, clear, and unencumbered by useless repetitions; they should be within the people's power of comprehension and as a rule not require much explanation. (n. 34)

Constitution on the Liturgy (emphases added)

Obvious but radical: Today these references to comprehension, understanding, and being fully aware of what we are doing, seem obvious and nothing more than common sense. In fact they are quite radical ideas in light of the way liturgy was viewed prior to Vatican Council II. Before the Constitution on the Liturgy, understanding the liturgy was neither possible for the average worshipper nor was it considered any great value. Because the liturgy was in Latin, because much of it was conducted in silence, and because it was considered to be the work of the priest alone, it was beyond the comprehension of most people.

Only the priest: The only obligation of lay people at the liturgy was to watch and internally unite oneself to whatever the priest was saying and doing; he, however, was the only active subject of the liturgy. The community was "audience to a sacred drama. . . . That the ritual was performed and the prayer was prayed in a dignified and correct manner was far more important than that the content of the prayer was understood. Whether the language of the prayer involved the community or was a true expression of their faith was of secondary importance."¹


This chapter is based on the above, which in turn is taken from her doctoral dissertation, *The Opening Prayers of the Sacramentary: A Structural Study of the Prayers of the Easter Cycle* (University of Notre Dame 1981).
Participation and understanding: The Constitution on the Liturgy tells us, at least implicitly, that full, active, conscious and fruitful participation in the liturgy requires "understanding." What does this mean? Understanding is aided by translation of the liturgical texts into the vernacular, but this by itself does not necessarily mean that they will be understood. Again, good proclamation of liturgical prayers is important, but not sufficient. Rather, understanding means that the people are deeply involved in the liturgy and engaged with one another and with God.

Our religious experience: Kathleen Hughes concludes, "the community's understanding of the meaning of the prayer will be directly proportionate to the relationship between the content of prayer and the religious experience of believers of which prayer is an expression." Liturgical prayers need not only be understood as an exercise of the mind, but also appropriated as religious experience in the heart.

Telling the community's story: Referring to the work of Hermann Schmidt, Hughes states:

... liturgical language belongs to an actual community assembled here and now, but a community with historical roots. If liturgical language is to be intelligible, if it is to be understood, if it is to engage the community in an event and in relationships, it must certainly be written in good, clear, contemporary language – but that is not enough. Liturgical language must also tell the community's story, the story of their salvation history which binds them to one another and to God in Christ.

The importance of context: Liturgical language needs to be understood in light of the context in which it is used. This context has two dimensions, the first of which is that of liturgical celebration: the rite in which a prayer is used, its use within that rite, its relationship to the liturgical year.

The community's self-understanding: The second element of context is the community that speaks the words of liturgical prayer. Liturgical language expresses the community's religious experience. To be intelligible, the community needs to disclose some aspects of the community's religious world. The story – the religious experience – that the community shares, is dialogue between the community and the God of its history and Tradition. It needs also to be the story of the community's present life experience. Both past and present are necessary; both past and present look to the future life of the community with its God.

Hughes continues:

Communication, in other words, requires a community of interpretation, a community with a common world of meaning, a common revelation, a common life experience, a common universe of discourse. And, as in any

2 Ibid., 3
4 Hughes, The Language of the Liturgy, 4
form of communication between persons who share a common world of meaning, rarely is any subject exhaustively verbalized. It does not need to be, for much is presupposed in the discourse situation.

Too much or too little: A balance is required between trying to say too much – trying to tell the whole story on every liturgical occasion – and not saying enough. If the prayer says too little it will not connect and involve the worshippers in the larger story of God's relationship with the human race.

Content and the Community

What is the community's role in formulating and interpreting its liturgical prayer? First, in such prayer the community expresses its own identity. As Kathleen Hughes says,

It describes itself, what it hopes for, what it longs for from its gracious God, what it understands as its task in the world, what obstacles prevent it from fulfilling its covenant. Through prayer the community also enters into a relational universe: it presents itself before God in Jesus Christ in the name of the human community.

The manner in which the community describes itself is important in several respects: it is a statement of the community's self-awareness and thus plays a critical role in inviting transformation; it relates to the inner logic of the petition; it expresses the ambiguity of the community's life in Christ. Above all, the content of prayer must be open to interpretation and appropriation by the community in whose name prayer is proclaimed.

We tell the story: In liturgical celebration the community - ourselves - come together to celebrate our common religious experience. We read scripture, we retell the mighty acts of God in prayer, we remember and hope. But in the final analysis the story is beyond our telling, it cannot be captured in words, it is too great and too full of mystery to be told as ordinary stories are.

New challenges: What happens as the community grows, as it enters new eras and cultures, as it encounters new needs and new opportunities? The old ways of telling the story now need to be expanded and adapted to new circumstances; the old story needs to be enriched with new understanding.

The new Sacramentary: Hughes explains that this is precisely what the post-conciliar commission that prepared opening prayers and other collects for the new Sacramentary attempted to do. They took older texts and adapted them; they also composed "new texts for the community's prayer which would reflect the changing mentality, needs, and circumstances of the praying community" today.

5 Ibid., 4
6 Ibid., 11
7 Ibid., 12
For various occasions: She suggests that this program of revision was most consistently and successfully carried out in the so-called “prayers for various occasions” that are toward the back of the Sacramentary.

This collection of texts breathes a new spirit: a spirit of universalism, of service, of engagement, of concern, of collaboration in the work of building up the kingdom. These prayers incorporated the contemporary experience of the Christian community into the prayer of the church, not altering that prayer fundamentally but enriching it with new experience. ⑧

Unfortunately, as Hughes points out, we rarely use this part of the Sacramentary and hence are almost never exposed to these new prayers.

Do they really work? The more regularly used liturgical prayers, those for the Sunday eucharistic liturgy, are mostly “a conservative recasting of ancient models.” (Of course, this does not apply to the alternative opening prayers of the Sacramentary, which are modern compositions in English.) Hughes raises two questions that need to be applied to each of these ancient texts.

• Do they express the faith experience of the contemporary community as they did that when they were originally composed?

• Are these prayers potentially transformative for people today?

Problem areas: As a result of her careful and critical analysis of some of the opening prayers of the Sacramentary, Hughes concludes:

If this sample of the opening prayers of the Lent and Easter cycle reveals the identity and concerns of the average believer, we would be forced to conclude from a goodly number of the present texts that the average believer: 1) rarely thinks, prays, or works in the context of the larger world; 2) is often a passive receiver, telling God of personal desires for the present and the future without becoming actively engaged in the work of the kingdom; 3) encounters few obstacles in the living of the Christian life; and 4) has long-range concerns as other-worldly and abstract as “your glory.” Can we afford to speak in generalities and abstractions when the story we are telling is about our covenant with God? ⑨
The Art of Translation

Most of the texts that we use in our liturgical celebration are translations from other languages. Furthermore, different translators are responsible for different kinds of texts.

Scripture Readings

The original languages of scripture are Hebrew and Greek, plus some Aramaic. The scripture translations we use are those of various organizations and publishers who do such work. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV) that has been used in the new edition of our Canadian Lectionary is sponsored by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. A preface in editions of the NRSV contains an explanation of the principles used by the committee of translators.

Common Liturgical Texts

International and ecumenical: "Common texts" include the Lord's Prayer, Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, Kyrie and Gloria, the preface dialogue (Sursum Corda), Holy Holy (Sanctus and Benedictus), Lamb of God (Agnus Dei), the Gloria Patri, Te Deum, Canticles of Mary, Zechariah and Simeon, and a few others. These texts are used by many churches, and we use an international and ecumenically-agreed-on translation.

ICET and ELLC: This translation was first prepared by a group of representatives of several churches and countries called the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET). Its work was published under the title, Prayers We Have In Common, of which there were three editions: 1970, 1971, and 1975. ICET then dissolved itself. A fourth edition of the same texts was prepared in 1988 by ICET's successor, the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), using the title, Praying Together.

Other Liturgical Texts

ICEL: Liturgical texts originally published in "typical editions" in Latin by the Vatican have been translated into English by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, an organization often referred to by its initials, ICEL.¹

¹ The history of ICEL, and discussions of some of its work since 1963 are described in Shaping English Liturgy: Studies in Honor of Archbishop Denis Hurley, edited by Peter C. Finn and James M. Schellman (Washington: Pastoral Press 1990)
Original texts: In addition, we use a relatively small number of texts that are not translations at all; these so-called original texts have been composed in English. The alternative opening prayers of the Sacramentary are an example. Additional original texts are being prepared for the revised edition of the Sacramentary, now being undertaken by ICEL.2

The Work of ICEL

Several stages: ICEL's work typically – but not always – proceeds in three stages. First, a “Green Book” version of a liturgical book is produced. This is a provisional edition, distributed for comments and suggestions for improvement. It may also be used for liturgical use if an episcopal conference so decides. After some period of time, using the comments that have been received and further reflection by ICEL, a definitive edition is produced; this is called the “White Book” edition. Some years later, again taking advantage of extensive pastoral experience and scholarly study, a revised edition may be published. The new edition of Order of Christian Funerals was the first liturgical book so revised;3 a revision of the Sacramentary is in progress.4

ICEL is an agency of the episcopal conferences, and only offers its work to the conferences. It is up to the bishops of each country or region to decide if they wish to use ICEL’s work, or use an alternative translation done locally. Each bishops’ conference then individually seeks confirmation of the ICEL translation from Rome.

Other languages: There are organizations similar to ICEL that produce international translations of liturgical books in French, German and Spanish.

The ICEL Translation Process

How does ICEL actually undertake the work of translation? Its work on the revision of the Sacramentary may be taken as typical. It proceeds in the following steps.5 Let us take an opening prayer as an example.

Documentation

Staff persons in the ICEL secretariat prepare initial documentation for each prayer. This includes the Latin original of the opening prayer, the present ICEL English version, and translations of the same texts in French, German and Italian.

---

3 The ICEL text of the revised funeral rite is copyright 1985; the Canadian edition is copyright 1990. A thorough and helpful explanation of the revision process, as applied to the funeral rite, is given by Michael Hodgetts, “Revising the Order of Christian Funerals,” in Shaping English Liturgy, 199-217
4 To inform the church regarding this project, ICEL has published three Progress Reports on the Revision of the Roman Missal, dated 1988, 1990 and 1992.
5 See also the article by Michael Hodgetts, note 3
The source of the Latin prayer is identified, if possible. Many of these Latin texts have been borrowed or adapted from ancient sacramentaries and missals published in the seventh to ninth centuries; others have been composed in recent times. It helps the translator to know the age and source of the original Latin text.

The vocabulary of the Latin prayer is studied. The most important words are checked to see in what other prayers each is used, and what range of meanings each word has; often a word is used in several ways in different prayers. A special Lexicon has been prepared by the ICEL staff that contains much of this information; other reference books are used as well.

Draft Translations

First draft: Individual Latin prayers are then assigned to a primary translator, who is also then provided with all the preliminary information just described. The primary translator is of course an expert in Latin, but also someone whose English writing style is very good. At the present time, most of the primary translators are professors of English. The primary translator then produces a first-draft version of the prayer in question.

Committee work: The first draft is then commented upon by the full ICEL Subcommittee on Translations and Revisions, of which the primary translator is a member. This subcommittee has approximately ten members, from at least six countries.

It is studied by each member of the committee prior to meeting, then read aloud, and then everyone comments and makes suggestions for improvement. Rarely does a first draft satisfy everyone. The subcommittee then agrees on what specific or general improvements need to be made.

Further revision: The text is then referred to a revisions committee of approximately three persons, including the translator. It takes another look at the text, and then undertakes a revision. This comes back to the full subcommittee, either at a meeting or by mail.

Final Approval

Advisory Committee: When the Subcommittee on Translations and Revisions is satisfied, usually after one or two revisions, each text is then considered by its parent body, the ICEL Advisory Committee. It has approximately twelve members, from at least eight countries. It carefully considers each text, and either accepts it, requires improvement in some way, or raises questions that it asks the Subcommittee to consider. If further work is done, then it comes back to the Advisory Committee for final approval, usually by mail.

Episcopal Board: When the Advisory Committee is satisfied with a text, it is submitted to the Episcopal Board, the governing body of ICEL. It is composed of one bishop from each of the eleven full member countries of ICEL. The bishops examine each text and either accept it, require further work, or raise questions.
Proposed translations cycle through this process until they are finally approved by the Episcopal Board. As described above, in the end all ICEL's work is submitted to the bishops of each country.

The Nature of Translation

Interpretation involved: There is an old Italian saying to the effect that a translator is also a traitor. No translator can produce a text that has exactly the same meaning, nuances, tone and feeling as the original. Translation always involves interpretation and adaptation, even if it tries to be slavishly faithful to the original. Translations are always open to criticism, therefore, for not rendering this or that nuance of the original; for not interpreting the text in some other way. Translators always have to make choices between legitimate alternatives; a translated text cannot say two different things at once.

Lawrence Boadt describes the process as follows:

Translation from one language to another involves the communication of a message from one grammatical, phonological, and lexical system to another which may or may not have the same forms available or in common use as the original language. The receptor language, that is, the language into which the translation is being made, must use the forms available in its own language system to express the meaning of the original language. The translator is faced with having to know the context of the original language and its grammar, as well as the context of the receptor language which will best reproduce the equivalent meaning.

An official church document that guides translations of liturgical books was published in 1969: “On the Translation of Liturgical Texts for Celebrations with a Congregation.” This little-known but very helpful document is published as an appendix to this chapter. It will be referred to as the Instruction on Translation. This document is well worth reading.

Word or sentence? One of the decisions that translators have to make regards what is called the “unit of meaning.” Is the translation to be made one word at a time, or is the meaning of each sentence or phrase to be rendered, without slavish attention to individual words? This is not only a technical question, but also a philosophical one. The Instruction on Translation (see below) clearly says that “the ‘unit of meaning’ is not the individual word but the whole passage.” (n. 12c) It also states that “A faithful translation, therefore, cannot be judged on the basis of individual words: the total context of this specific act of communication must be kept in mind, as well as the literary form proper to the respective language.” (n. 6) It says that “The purpose of liturgical translations is to proclaim the message of salvation to believers and to express the prayer of the Church to the Lord . . . “. (n. 6)

Lawrence Boadt, “Problems in the Translation of Scripture as Illustrated by ICEL’s Project on the Liturgical Psalter,” in Shaping English Liturgy, 405-429. Boadt’s explanation of the nature of translation is helpful.
Overall requirements: Translations of liturgical texts need to be faithful to the Latin original, expressed in good English, and effective when proclaimed aloud. Most importantly, they need to be capable of being real prayer for worshippers around the world.

An evolving style: Some of the translations carried out by ICEL today have a different character than those done in 1969 and the early 1970s. This should not be surprising. ICEL is a growing, dynamic organization; its staff and the members of its various boards, committees and subcommittees have changed over the years. There has been a great deal of pastoral experience and scholarly study that simply was not available in the early days. In the 1970 Sacramentary collects such as opening prayers were deliberately terse and simple. In the revision now being carried out, the opening prayers will be fuller, convey more of the content of the Latin original, and use a somewhat different style of English. They will have more content, and use more memorable English.

Here is an example of the evolution of a single opening prayer:

Latin

Omnipotens sempiterne Deus,
deduc nos ad societatem caelestium gaudiorum,
ut eo perveniat humilitas gregis,
quo processit fortitudo pastoris.
Per dominum.

Present ICEL version (1970)

Almighty and ever-living God,
give us new strength
from the courage of Christ our shepherd,
and lead us to join the saints in heaven,
where he lives and reigns . . . .

Draft Revision

God of everlasting power,
draw us toward the fellowship of your
saints in heaven,
so that, under the guidance of Christ, the
Good Shepherd,
who has gone before us
and whose voice we know,
the one flock of Christ may rest by your side.

Proposed Revision

God of everlasting power,
guide us toward the joyful
company of heaven,
so that your lowly flock may follow
where Christ, the great Shepherd,
has gone before.
Appendix:

*Instruction on Translation*

General Principles

5. A liturgical text, inasmuch as it is a ritual sign, is a medium of spoken communication. It is, first of all, a sign perceived by the senses and used by men to communicate with each other. But to believers who celebrate the sacred rites a word is itself a "mystery." By spoken words Christ himself speaks to his people and the people, through the Spirit in the Church, answer their Lord.

6. The purpose of liturgical translations is to proclaim the message of salvation to believers and to express the prayer of the Church to the Lord: 'Liturgical translations have become . . . the voice of the Church' (address of Paul VI to participants in the congress on translations of liturgical texts, 10 November 1965). To achieve this end, it is not sufficient that a liturgical translation merely reproduce the expressions and ideas of the original text. Rather it must faithfully communicate to a given people, and in their own language, that which the Church by means of this given text originally intended to communicate to another people in another time. A faithful translation, therefore, cannot be judged on the basis of individual words: the total context of this specific act of communication must be kept in mind, as well as the literary form proper to the respective language.

7. Thus, in the case of liturgical communication, it is necessary to take into account not only the message to be conveyed, but also the speaker, the audience, and the style. Translations, therefore, must be faithful to the art of communication in all its various aspects, but especially in regard to the message itself, in regard to the audience for which it is intended, and in regard to the manner of expression.

8. Even if in spoken communication the message cannot be separated from the manner of speaking, the translator should give first consideration to the meaning of the communication.

9. To discover the true meaning of a text, the translator must follow the scientific methods of textual study as used by experts. This part of the translator's task is obvious. A few points may be added with reference to liturgical texts:

10. a. If need be, a critical text of the passage must first be established so that the translation can be done from the original or at least from the best available text.

---

7 This is officially called the *Instruction Comme le prévoit, On the Translation of Liturgical Texts for Celebration with a Congregation*. It was published by the Consilium, the official body charged with implementing the liturgical reform initiated by Vatican Council II. The original language of the document is French; the English version was supplied by the Consilium. Only excerpts are presented here. This document is published in full in *Documents on the Liturgy 1963–1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts*. Prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1982), 123, nn 838-880
11. b. Latin terms must be considered in the light of their uses—historical or cultural, Christian or liturgical. For example, the early Christian use of *devotio* differs from its use in classical or more modern times. The Latin *oratio* means in English not an oration (one of its senses in classical Latin) but a prayer—and this English word bears different meanings, such as prayer of praise or prayer in general or prayer of petition. *Pius* and *pietas* are very inadequately rendered in English as pious and piety. In one case the Latin *salus* may mean salvation in the theological sense; elsewhere it may mean safety, health (physical health or total health), or well-being. *Sarx-carо* is inadequately rendered in English as flesh. *Doulos-serua* and *famula* are inadequately rendered in English by slave, servant, handmaid. The force of an image or metaphor must also be considered, whether it is rare or common, living or worn out.

12. c. The translator must always keep in mind that the “unit of meaning” is not the individual word but the whole passage. The translator must therefore be careful that the translation is not so analytical that it exaggerates the importance of particular phrases while it obscures or weakens the meaning of the whole. Thus, in Latin, the piling up of *ratam, rationabileм, acceptabileм* may increase the sense of invocation. In other tongues, a succession of adjectives may actually weaken the force of the prayer. The same is true of *beatissima Virgo* or *beata et gloriosa* or the routine addition of *sanctus* or *beatus* or a saint’s name, or the too casual use of superlatives. Understatement in English is sometimes the more effective means of emphasis.

13. d. To keep the correct signification, words and expressions must be used in their proper historical, social, and ritual meanings. Thus, in prayers for Lent, *ieiunium* now has the sense of lenten observance, both liturgical and ascetic; the meaning is not confined to abstinence from food. *Tapeinos-humilis* originally had “class” overtones not present in the English humble or even lowly. Many of the phrases of approach to the Almighty were originally adapted from forms of address to the sovereign in the courts of Byzantium and Rome. It is necessary to study how far an attempt should be made to offer equivalents in modern English for such words as *quaesumus, dignare, clementissime, maiestas*, and the like.
Liturgical Prayer as Narrative

A story of faith: Helen Kathleen Hughes considers liturgical texts such as the opening prayers to be a kind of narrative or story.¹ The stories that are told are not fictional or the products of our imagination. Rather, in such prayers the worshipping community tells stories of its faith – we tell stories of our faith. In liturgical prayer we tell and praise the mighty acts of God. The narrative is God’s own story; we are participants in God’s story.

A special kind of story: Liturgical prayer also constitutes a particular subclass within the general category of narrative/story. It has its own patterns, its own “rules,” and its own special language. Hughes suggests that the story telling of liturgical prayer goes as follows.

The Story Tellers

Told from within: In liturgical prayer the story tellers – the worshipping community – are not outside the story, speaking about the story from a distance, as often is the case in other kinds of narrative. Instead, they speak from inside the story; they are personally involved in the prayer narrative. This kind of relationship with the story is expressed in two ways.

Pronouns used: In liturgical prayer we refer to God using the second person pronoun “you.” We refer to ourselves in the first person: “we” and “us.” For example, “by this Easter mystery you touch our lives with the healing power of your love. You have given us the freedom of the (children) of God.” By this use of first and second person language “God’s story and that of the community merge.”

Naming God: In our prayer narrative we address and name God in ways (God, Lord, Father) that recall our covenant relationship with God. We in fact go beyond simply remembering this relationship, but as well acknowledge it as “a dynamic reality to be lived.”² Hughes affirms that “the covenant relationship is the very heart of the story.” In addressing God at or near the beginning of each prayer narrative, we repeatedly accept again the covenant that God offers to us. We also accept the consequences of the covenant relationship; it has an impact on our hearts, minds and daily lives.

¹ Helen Kathleen Hughes, The Language of the Liturgy: Some Theoretical and Practical Implications (Washington: International Commission on English in the Liturgy n.d.). This is taken from her doctoral dissertation, The Opening Prayers of the Sacramentary: A Structural Study of the Prayers of the Easter Cycle (University of Notre Dame 1981). This chapter is based on her studies.
² Ibid., 6
³ Ibid., 6
The Language Used

**Biblical language:** The language that is used in the narrative of our liturgical prayers is more limited than that used in other kinds of narrative. It is derived from the Tradition of the community's experience of faith; it comes basically from the earliest and preeminent story the faith, the bible. The core of liturgical prayer is the covenant relationship between God and humankind, and the privileged account of this story is the bible.

**Based on scripture:** The story that is liturgical prayer therefore relies heavily on scripture for its content and its interpretation. “Biblical narrative provides the community with the indispensable frame of reference for the meaningful use of language in the liturgy.”

**Possible confusion:** In reusing biblical language and images in liturgical prayers, they may be used in ways that alter their content and meaning; this may result in confusion and misinterpretation. The use of the biblical story in liturgical prayer needs to be consistent with the original scriptural meaning.

A Story for Today

**Always for today:** There is no “once upon a time” in the narrative of liturgical prayer. The worshipping community always tells its story “today.” God is encountered today; we respond to God’s mighty deeds today in our liturgical celebration.

**Past into present and future:** Biblical stories of God’s relationship with humanity in the past are memorialized in the present because we believe that the same relationship is also experienced today. The events of the past are named because we believe that they are promises that what is now experienced in the present will be again in the future.

A Story for the Journey

**Looking forward:** The narrative of liturgical prayer is future-oriented; it is for people on the journey. Unlike many “regular” narratives, it does not reach a resolution in the present. The story of liturgical prayer always looks forward to the reign of God; its ultimate goal is the coming again of Jesus Christ.

**On the journey:** The Christian life is journeying toward the reign of God, and our prayer story reflects this fact. As we journey, we look forward to our goal; as we journey, we place our needs before God. We ask for God’s help in remaining faithful to our covenant with God. We hope and pray for future life in the full presence of God.

A Story for Transformation

**Deepens faith:** The narrative of liturgical prayer has a unique potential to transform those who tell the story. In liturgical prayer we express our self-understanding as people of faith. In addition, however, the language of prayer

---

*Ibid., 6*
deepens and enlarges the community's experience of faith, depicting what the community is summoned to become in the power of the Spirit, inviting wholehearted response. In this function, liturgical prayer is potentially transformational.  

Hughes adds,

The language of prayer, reflecting as it does God's saving encounter with humankind in and through Christ, deliberately shatters our ordinary categories, using ordinary words in extraordinary ways, often presenting logic-defying irreconcilables in juxtaposition. The community is sinner and saved, powerless and graced by God, singer of God's praises and needy receiver of God's gracious gifts. The mystery of the community's story unfolds week by week in the assembly of prayer.

The language of prayer invites the praying community, bound to God by covenant love, to let go of all other ties that bind; to become powerless that God might fill it with power; to be utterly confident not because of its worth but because God is faithful; to be levelled and to be lifted up by the God whom it encounters in its prayer. The language of the Christian community is at one and the same time an expression of its experience of faith and a summons to conversion and transformation.  

The Story's Context

In the liturgy: We do not tell the stories of liturgical prayer to ourselves, all alone at home; we do not read them aloud or quietly to ourselves. They are public stories, to be proclaimed publicly in the assembly of the church gathered for worship. The context of the story is the liturgy – the public worship of God by God's holy people. This context itself is part of the message, and a key to interpreting the stories.

The paschal mystery: In liturgical prayer the community places its petition in a context: it celebrates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; it offers praise and thanksgiving to God.

In the very act of gathering to celebrate the mighty acts of God, the community becomes aware of its need. In the midst of fulfilling its covenant, the praise of God, the community recognizes its own need for transformation: loving servants become once again loved sinners, recipients of God's generosity.

Body of Christ: The self-understanding of the community is profoundly deepened and expanded when it tells its story in the context of liturgical celebration. Hughes concludes, "Ultimately, transformation becomes possible when the human community gathers as the Body of Christ."  

---

5 Ibid., 8
6 Ibid., 10
7 Ibid., 10
8 Ibid., 10

101
Language of Silence

For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
...a time for silence,
and a time to speak.

Ecclesiastes 3.1, 7

To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bearing. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.

Constitution on the Liturgy, n. 30

Silence is another language through which we express ourselves and community in liturgical celebrations, though we may not we used to think of silence in this way. It is also a very important language in the liturgy, but one not always highly valued by all. Here we reflect briefly on the kinds and occasions of silence in our liturgical celebrations, and its purposes and meanings.

Kinds of Silence

There are several kinds of silence in the liturgy.

Between words: There is silence between the words that are spoken, when the speaker takes a breath or deliberately pauses for effect or emphasis.

To listen: One person or group is silent while others speak. For example, the presider is silent while the people speak; the people are silent while the presider speaks. Presider and people may be silent while the cantor sings.

During private prayers: The people have additional occasions of silence while the priest says prayers “quietly” – that is, inaudibly, during the preparation of the gifts and before communion.

During actions: There may be silence during symbolic actions, for example, the elevations, the breaking of bread, the laying on of hands in some liturgies.

For practical reasons: There may be silence for purely practical reasons, for example, while readers make their way to and from the ambo. Sometimes this is unintended, as when someone loses the place in a book, or someone is forgetful.

For reflection and prayer: Silence is specified or offered in the rite, as an integral part of the rite.

This article will focus on occasions when all are silent and when silence is an integral part of the liturgy.
Opportunities for Silence

The rubrics and introductions to rites offer many opportunities for silence.

Eucharist

The Sacramentary prescribes or provides opportunity for silence at the following times during the eucharistic liturgy.

- After the invitation to pray in the rite of blessing and sprinkling holy water: "After a brief silence . . .".
- After the invitation of the penitential rite: "A pause for silent reflection follows. After the silence . . .".
- After the invitation to pray of the opening prayer: "Priest and people pray silently for a while."
- After communion: "A period of silence may now be observed . . .".
- After the invitation to pray the prayer after communion: "Priest and people pray in silence for a while, unless a period of silence has already been observed."

After the readings: It is not specified in the Sacramentary itself that there should also be moments of silence after the readings and homily. However, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal states that "at the conclusion of a reading or the homily all meditate briefly on what has been heard." (n. 23) This is made more clear in the Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass: "Proper times for silence during the liturgy of the word are, for example, before this liturgy begins, after the first and second reading, after the homily." (n. 28)

Liturgy of the Hours

Silence is also specified in other liturgies. The General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours states:

An opportunity for silence should . . . be provided in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours. (n. 201)

It is permissible, as occasion offers and prudence suggests, to have an interval of silence, either after the repetition of the antiphon at the end of the psalm, in the traditional way, especially if the psalm-prayer is to be said after the pause, or after the short or longer readings, before or after the responsory. (n. 202)

---

1 See also General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), n 32
2 See also GIRM, 56j
Other Liturgies

The Rite of Baptism for Children outside Mass has the following rubric after the homily: "After the homily, or in the course of or after the litany, it is desirable to have a period of silence while all pray at the invitation of the celebrant. (n. 46) In the rite during Mass the rubric merely says, "After the homily, it is desirable to have a period of silence." (n. 89)

At the post-baptismal anointing the rubrics direct: "Next, the celebrant anoints each child on the crown of the head with chrism, in silence." (nn. 65, 106)

The laying on of hands in the several liturgies of ordination also takes place in silence.

In the liturgy of anointing the sick, there is a period of silence after the invitation of the penitential rite (n. 118). Under the heading "Response" after the scripture reading the rubric reads, "A brief period of silence may be observed after the reading of the word of God" (n. 120). At the laying on of hands the rubric says, "In silence, the priest lays his hands on the head of the sick person." (n. 122)

In the liturgy of viaticum outside mass, there is again "a brief period of silence" after the invitation of the penitential rite (n. 200). After "communion as viaticum" there is a title, "Silent Prayer;" the rubric reads, "Then a period of silence may be observed." (n. 208)

Funerals: The General Introduction to the Order of Christian Funerals includes an entire section on silence:

Prayerful silence is an element important to the celebration of the funeral rites. Intervals of silence should be observed, for example, after each reading and during the final commendation and farewell, to permit the assembly to reflect upon the word of God and the meaning of the celebration. (34)

Functions of Silence

Silence has different functions or purposes on different occasions. That is, what we are supposed to do with the silence - or what silence is supposed to do with us - is not always the same, but varies with the specific part of the eucharistic liturgy. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal is quite clear on this point:

Silence should be observed at the designated times as part of the celebration. Its function depends on the time it occurs in each part of the celebration. Thus at the penitential rite and again after the invitation to pray, all recollect themselves; at the conclusion of a reading or the homily, all meditate briefly on what has been heard; after communion, all praise God in silent prayer. (n. 23)
With respect to the opening prayer, the General Instruction adds,

Next the priest invites the people to pray and together with him they observe a brief silence so that they may realize they are in God's presence and may call their petitions to mind. (n. 32)

With respect to the liturgy of the word, the Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass tells us that:

The liturgy of the word must be celebrated in a way that fosters meditation: clearly, any sort of haste that hinders reflectiveness must be avoided. The dialogue between God and his people taking place through the Holy Spirit demands short intervals of silence, suited to the assembly, as an opportunity to take the word of God to heart and prepare a response to it in prayer. (n. 28)

The Congregation of Divine Worship's 1973 letter Eucharistiae participationem... on the eucharistic prayers, tells us:

In order to ensure the full impact of the words and greater spiritual profit, attention must always be given, as so many desire, to the sacred silence that at stated times must be observed as a part of the liturgy. This will allow all the participants, according to the nature and reason for the period of silence, either to reflect on their own lives, to meditate briefly on what they have heard, or to praise and entreat God in their hearts.

The General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours says: "In order to receive in our hearts the full resonance of the voice of the Holy Spirit and to unite our personal prayer more closely with the word of God and the public voice of the Church..." (n. 202) there should be opportunities for silence. This document also adds, "Care must be taken to avoid the kind of silence that would disturb the structure of the Office, or embarrass and weary those taking part." (n. 202)

Collectively, these documents give the following reasons for keeping silence:
• to recollect ourselves
• to reflect on our own lives
• to meditate on what has been heard
• to take the word of God to heart
• to prepare a response to the word of God in prayer
• to realize we are in God's presence
• to praise God
• to call our petitions to mind
• to entreat God
• to engage in dialogue with God through the Holy Spirit
• to receive in our hearts the full resonance of the voice of the Holy Spirit
• to unite our personal prayer more closely with the word of God and the public voice of the church.

Reflections

Intentional: Silence in the liturgy is not empty or purposeless; it is not a mistake. Silence is intentional, filled with purpose, and is integral to the liturgical celebration. It seems logical to conclude, therefore, that liturgy cannot be complete and fully authentic without silence.

Silence for all: We worship as individuals-in-community. The primary subject of liturgical celebration is the community, not individuals privately, alone, all by themselves. The communal dimension of liturgy is experienced when we listen together, speak together, sing together, keep silence together.

Silence for individuals: And yet the assembly is made up of individual persons united in the Spirit of Christ. These individuals live their own lives, have their own consciences, enjoy their own relationship with God. The legitimate needs of individual members of the community are especially honored in periods of silence. In silence we become more conscious of who we are as individual persons in community. We have an opportunity to bring our own lives and experiences to the common celebration. We can speak our own needs, apply the word to our own lives, dialogue with God face to face. We can reflect on the unique gifts that the Holy Spirit brings to each for the building up of the church. There is space for each of us as individuals; we can bring our own faith-stories to the communal celebration.

The opening prayer of the eucharistic liturgy consists of an invitation to pray, a time for silent prayer, the spoken prayer of the presider, and the Amen of the people. The ancient tradition of the church is that the most important part of the opening prayer is the period of silence, in which each person pours out their spirit to God, and brings their life experiences and the needs of others they know of to the community's prayer.

Healthy tension: There will always be a healthy tension between silence and speech in the liturgy; we will always struggle to try to balance them in the most appropriate way. To be aware of this tension is helpful. Liturgical speech – even these holy words – can constitute an escape from the potentially frightening experience of meeting ourselves deeply and meeting God deeply. Silence – even holy silence – can also be an escape from challenging words.

In daily life: Like most aspects of liturgy, silence – and the tension between silence and speech – should reflect and promote silence in our daily lives. We also appreciate that our world today does not encourage silence in our daily lives, and we are part of that world. As with scripture, prayer, stories, meals - without silence in our daily lives we will have difficulty with the silence in our Sunday liturgy. Helping people find the riches of liturgical silence means also helping them find and value silence during the week. Liturgical presiders and other parish ministers need to provide leadership in keeping holy silence as well as in proclaiming holy speech. People need to be taught how to express themselves and communicate using the language of silence.

We conclude with these words of Gail Ramshaw:

Christian silence is not a religious mysticism that forgoes words. Christian silence is the moment after words, the time of awe at the revelation.
Christian silence is Mary, quietly pondering in her heart the words of her son. Christian silence is Mary of Bethany, sitting attentively at Jesus' feet while he pauses for a breath. The Hebrew Scriptures speak of our awe in the holy place, our keeping silence in the Lord's temple. But in the incarnation God has moved out of the Most Holy Place and into a stable, up onto a cross. These words strike us mute. With old Zechariah we have heard the angel's promise and we are struck silent for a time. Christian silence is the moment of meditation after the hearing of the sacred speech, as if in the silence we can travel up the words, through the words, into the very silence of God. So some Christians keep silence after the Gospel, the homily, or the communion. Christian silence is not only the minutes given us to think about the words, the time to reflect on the layers of denotations and connotations of our complex Christian vocabulary. Christian silence is meditation beyond the words, when finally granting all our biblical exegesis and metaphoric interpretation, we rest, and like Jacob asleep, allow God to come down the ladder into our quiet space and bless us.

Christian silence is an acknowledgement that our words about God are not, finally, the actual being of God. Our assembly contains the words, but even the heavens and earth cannot contain God. The mystery of Christian worship is that in our sacred speech, in our little bread and wine, God chooses to be revealed. But our liturgy does not contain all there is of God. Perhaps, in speaking of Christ, our liturgical language conveys all of God that we can bear. But there is far more, and hearing those words about God is part of our hope of heaven.4

Further Reading

Nancy Jay Crumbine, "On silence," Humanitas, vol. 11, no. 2 (May 1975) 147-166

Mary Agnes Earner, "Silent dwelling: well-spring of communication," Humanitas, vol. 11, no. 2 (May 1975) 167-176


Margaret Harvey, Worship and Silence. Grove Booklet on Ministry and Worship 39 (Bramcote: Grove Press 1975)

Kevin W. Irwin, Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press 1984) 268-269


107
Women in the Lectionary

Eileen Schuller

Eileen Schuller is an Ursuline Sister of Chatham, Ontario. She has degrees in Classics from the University of Alberta, in Near Eastern Studies from the University of Toronto, and in Near Eastern Language and Civilization from Harvard University. She is a recognized expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Sister Schuller is a member of the subcommittee on the liturgical psalter of ICEL, and recently was a member of the advisory committee on the new Canadian edition of the lectionary. Formerly on the faculty of Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, she is now associate professor of religious studies at McMaster University in Hamilton.

The Canadian Church has been using the new edition of the Sunday lectionary for just over one year now. In the past year, I have been asked on more than one occasion whether the lectionary is “favorable” to women and whether the new edition of the lectionary is “better or worse” for women in comparison with what we were using previously. While this might not be the precise way I would choose to formulate the question, the concern expressed is valid: there is something of real importance at stake for women and for the church as a whole in the choice of scripture passages which are heard in the regular Sunday morning assembly.

In offering some reflections on this issue, I would want to situate the question within a somewhat broader perspective. On the one hand, the lectionary introduced in Advent 1969 has been widely acclaimed as one of the most successful achievements of the liturgical reform; it fulfills the mandate of the Second Vatican Council that in our Sunday assemblies we have “more reading from Holy Scripture and it is to be more varied and suitable” (Constitution on the Liturgy, n. 35), arranged so as to focus on the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. This does not mean, however, that over the last twenty years, no questions have been raised about specific aspects of lectionary structure and selection. There has been, for example, considerable critique of the choice of the Old Testament passages in Ordinary Time, particularly insofar as they are selected to “harmonize” (Introduction for the Lectionary, n. 67) with the New Testament in a more-or-less typological way.

More recently, serious questions have been asked about what our congregations hear about women as the lectionary is read over the three-year cycle. Do the passages read on Sunday morning help or hinder us in dealing with what it means for women to have a full and equal role in both church and society? Are the stories about women which are in the bible adequately represented in the lectionary, or

1 For a discussion of the new edition as well as basic information about the lectionary, see National Bulletin on Liturgy, Winter 1992, pp 199-220

does the choice of Sunday readings give the impression that the bible is even more male-centered than one would find if one sat down and read it through as a whole? Are there some passages which, even though they are in the bible, need not or should not necessarily be read in the Sunday assembly? When we recall that a lectionary is, by definition, selective (that is, certain biblical passages are read, and others are omitted) it is appropriate to ask if concern about women was given adequate or even explicit consideration in the choices of passages made in the late 1960s. The question becomes even more important when we admit that for many Catholics the Sunday readings become "the bible;" these are virtually the only scripture passages which they read or know.

Before attempting to survey briefly both what we do find in the lectionary and what is omitted, I would want to make two brief asides. I am interested specifically in the choice of passages, rather than the related (and also important) issue of the specific translation from Greek or Hebrew which is used. The new edition of the lectionary adopts the New Revised Standard Version translation which strives to avoid masculine-orientated language in passages which refer to both men and women. Thus, for language about people, the new edition of the lectionary is more inclusive than the previous edition (though the NRSV is by no means the "last word" on this point, and there is need for much further study of principles of translation, particularly for use in a liturgical context).

Secondly, it needs to be emphasized that the new edition of the lectionary is not a revision or a re-doing of the lectionary per se. The choice of readings follows the lectionary of the universal church, as promulgated in 1969, with minor supplements added in 1981. Occasionally a reading was slightly expanded by the addition of a few verses, but any major rethinking of the choice of readings remains a project for the future.

Women in the Old Testament Readings

Though traditional study of the bible has tended to put the emphasis on leading male figures, there are many more women mentioned in the Old Testament than has often been realized. Of these, Sarah appears in two Old Testament readings in the Sunday lectionary (Genesis 18.1-10, 16th Sunday C; and Genesis 17.15-26, 21.1-7, Holy Family B) as well as in the second reading from Hebrews 11 (Holy Family B and 19th Sunday C). We also are introduced to Hannah (1 Samuel 1.20-28, Holy Family C), the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17.10-16, 32nd Sunday B; 1 Kings 17.8-24, 10th Sunday C), the "wealthy woman of Shunem" (2 Kings 4.4-17, 13th Sunday A) and, more indirectly, the "wife of Uriah" (2 Samuel 12.7-13, 11th Sunday C). With the addition of a verse in the new edition, Miriam "and all the women [who] went out with her with tambourines and with dancing" (Exodus 15.20) are part of the Exodus reading at the Easter Vigil.

For a brief statement of both the principles of translation and some of the broader issues, see the introduction by the NRSV Committee at the beginning of any edition of the NRSV.

Many of these passages are the focus of discussion in The Women's Bible Commentary, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., (Knoxville: Westminster/John Knox Press 1992)
However, many women of the Old Testament receive no mention in the Sunday lectionary. We do not hear the stories of the matriarchs, Rebekah and Rachel, nor of Hagar, Deborah, or Huldah, the prophet to whom King Josiah turned in order to authenticate the law code found in the temple (2 Kings 22.14-15). Although the opening chapters of the book of Exodus are filled with women whose acts of courage and initiative saved the life of Moses and made possible the divine plan of deliverance (the midwives Shiprah and Puah, the mother of Moses, his sister, his wife Zipporah), none of these are in the lectionary.

There are no readings at all from the books of Ruth, Judith or Esther. Nor do we ever hear the stories of three of the women whom Matthew includes in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1.3-6): Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. And even in many of the examples given above, the “harmonization” with the gospel shifts the perspective away from the women in the Old Testament passage (for example, the reading from Genesis 18 highlights Abraham’s hospitality to his guests and the gospel tells of Mary and Martha’s hospitality to Jesus; Sarah’s presence and even the promise that she shall have a son become secondary).

It is especially instructive to see how the creation narratives in Genesis 1-3 are treated in the lectionary, given that these chapters have been so formative in our understanding of male/female relationships and roles. The Priestly version in Genesis 1 which speaks of God creating men and women together in the divine image is read at the Easter Vigil, and thus is heard only on this one occasion by that segment of the community who attend this service. Instead, on Sunday mornings on three separate occasions (Lent 1 A, 10th and 27 Sundays B) the assembly hears parts of the creation story from Genesis 2-3, a text which is much more problematic in that it can be interpreted to imply that women are subordinate and to be blamed for sin coming into the world. However, some passages which have been very influential in the past in shaping attitudes are not included at all (for example, Genesis 3.16, “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing . . . and your husband shall rule over you”).

The biblical passages which speak with rich female imagery in praise of Lady Wisdom are well represented in the lectionary: Proverbs 8.22-31, Trinity Sunday C; Proverbs 9.1-6, 20th Sunday B; Wisdom 6.12-16, 32nd Sunday A; Wisdom 7.7-11, 28th Sunday B; Sirach 24.1-12, 2nd Sunday after Christmas; Baruch 3.9-15 – 4.4, Easter Vigil). The wisdom texts from Proverbs and Ben Sira which speak most harshly and negatively about wives, daughters and the “foreign woman” are omitted. The lectionary does include the praise of the “capable wife” from Proverbs 31 (33rd Sunday A), paralleling her to the man with five talents in the gospel of the day; in the new edition of the lectionary, some verses are added to include her qualities of business acumen and wisdom. The reading from Sirach 3.2-16 on the obligation to parents (Holy Family A) is, for the most part, explicit in speaking of both fathers and mothers.

Another type of passage draws upon female imagery and language in speaking of God. A few of these are found in the lectionary, including Isaiah 49.14-15 (8th

---

5 There has been much discussion among biblical scholars in recent years about whether the problems are with how Genesis 2-3 has been interpreted through the centuries or whether the text itself is fundamentally androcentric. For two opposing views, compare Phyllis Trible, “A Love Story Gone Awry,” in God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1978) 72-143; and David Clines, “What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Irredeemably Androcentric Orientations in Genesis 1-3,” in What Does Eve Do to Help? (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1990) 9-24
Sunday A), "Does a woman forget her nursing child . . ." and Isaiah 66.13 (14th Sunday C), "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you," although many others are never read in the context of the Sunday assembly.

Women in the Gospel Readings

Since the intent of extending the Sunday lectionary to a three-year cycle was to read the gospels in their entirety, we can rightly expect that all the gospel material about women would be included.6 Thus over the three-years, we hear of:

• the Canaanite woman who challenges Jesus (Matthew 15.21-28, 20th Sunday A);
• Simon's mother-in-law who is cured and "began to serve them" (Mark 1.29-31, 5th Sunday B);
• the healing of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5.21-43, 13th Sunday B);
• the widow with her offering (Mark 12.41-44, 32nd Sunday B);
• the woman who anoints Jesus (Luke 7.36-50, 11th Sunday C);7
• the raising of the son of the widow of Naim (Luke 7.11-17, 10th Sunday C);
• Mary and Martha who welcome Jesus into their home (Luke 10.38-42, 16th Sunday C);
• Martha's confession of faith, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the son of God" (John 11.1-44, Lent 5 A);
• the Samaritan woman at whose testimony many come to believe (John 4.5-42, Lent 3 A);
• the woman taken in adultery (John 8.1-11, Lent 5 C);
• the women who go to the tomb on Easter morning (Matthew 28.1-10, Mark 16.1-8, Luke 24.1-12, Easter Vigil).8

In addition, we read a number of stories which involve Mary:

• the Annunciation (Luke 1.26-38, Advent 4 B);

---

6 This does not mean that every verse in all the gospels is read. In general, where the same incident occurs in two or three gospels only one version is included.

7 The Matthean version of this story is not read at all (Matthew 26.6-13) which is somewhat ironic given that the pericope ends, "Truly, I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

8 [Editor's note: It also needs to be remembered that Ordinary Sundays 6 through 13 are sometimes omitted because of variation in the date of Easter. Ordinary Sundays 9 through 11 are omitted half the time or more. These omissions are not evenly divided among cycles A, B and C, at least within the span of, for example, the six complete three-year cycles between 1972 and 1989. In that period Ordinary Sunday 7 A was omitted 3 times, 7 B was omitted twice, and 7 C was omitted 4 times. Readings that involve women that are scheduled for Ordinary Sundays 6 through 13 will actually be used only occasionally, therefore.]
• the visit to Elizabeth (Luke 1.39-45, Advent 4 C);
• the Christmas story;
• the wedding feast of Cana (John 2.1-12, 2nd Sunday C);
• Mary at the foot of the Cross (John 19.25-27, Good Friday);
• Mary in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 1.12-14, Easter 7 A).

In the earlier edition of the lectionary, a number of passages about women only appeared in the long version of a gospel reading, and so were omitted when a community chose the shorter reading. In the new edition, a few of these passages are now always read, e.g.:

• the women who travelled with Jesus and "provided for them out of their own resources" (Luke 8.1-3, 11th Sunday C);
• the parable of the woman who mixes yeast in the dough, (Matthew 13.33, 16th Sunday A).

But there are still a number of occasions when, if the shorter reading is chosen, stories about women are what is omitted, e.g.:

• the women who stand by the cross and prepare the body for burial in Mark 15.40-47 and Matthew 27.55-61, Passion Sunday;
• the woman with a hemorrhage in Mark 5.25-34, 13th Sunday B;
• the woman who anoints Jesus before his passion (Mark 14.3-9, Passion Sunday B 7);
• the prophet Anna in Luke 2.36-40, Holy Family B.

A few stories are absent totally from the lectionary. Most odd is the omission of Luke's account of the "daughter of Abraham" cured by Jesus on the sabbath (Luke 13.10-17). Previously neither of the two post-resurrection appearances to Mary Magdalene was included (Mark 16.9-11 and John 20.11-18); the new edition now gives these verses from John as an optional addition on Easter Sunday and as an optional gospel when November 2 falls on a Sunday.

The lectionary also includes parables and stories in which women feature as the main character:

• the widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18.1-8, 29th Sunday C);
• the woman searching for her lost coin, paralleling the shepherd searching for his lost sheep (Luke 15.8-9, 24th Sunday C);
• the woman mixing in the yeast, paralleling the man sowing the mustard seed (Matthew 13.31-33, 16th Sunday A).

---

**Women in the Epistles**

We know from both the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles the names of a number of women in the early church, some of whom held positions of leadership and engaged in missionary work; yet almost none of these appear in the Sunday lectionary. For example, there is no mention of:
• Tabitha “devoted to good works and acts of charity” (Acts 9.36-42);
• Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, the first European convert and head of the household where Paul stayed in Philippi (Acts 16.14-15, 40);
• the four daughters of Philip “who had the gift of prophecy” (Acts 21.10);
• Prisca, whom Paul considers “a co-worker in Christ Jesus” (Romans 16.3-4);
• Junia “prominent among the apostles” (Romans 16.7);
• Euodia and Syntyche, co-workers of Paul who “struggled beside me in the work of the gospel” (Philippians 4.2-3);
• Eunice and Lois, mother and grandmother who passed the faith on to Timothy (2 Timothy 1.5).

One of the places where a woman is named is the passing reference to Chloe (1 Corinthians 1.11, 3rd Sunday A), unfortunately not a name which many people today even recognize as female.

In addition to specific women, the epistles include a number of statements about women and their place in the Christian community. We read Paul’s declaration of the profound and radical effect of baptism: “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3.28, 12th Sunday C). Those passages which give more concrete directions for roles and role distinction between men and women have not been included in the Sunday lectionary, probably because their problematic and time-bound nature was recognized: for example, the injunction that women veil their heads (1 Corinthians 11.1-16) or keep silent (1 Corinthians 14.34-35) or 1 Timothy 2.15, “she will be saved through childbearing”.

If there is any single text which has generated discussion about whether or not it should be included in the lectionary it is the passages, “wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord” (Ephesians 5.22, 21st Sunday B); the comparable text from Colossians 3.18-19 is optional for Holy Family A. Both passages belong to the category of “household codes,” which in the Greco-Roman world was an established genre of writing which outlined right conduct in hierarchical relations: children/parents, masters/slaves, husbands/wives. The lectionary chooses not to read the sections on slaves and masters. In the most recent revision of the lectionary in the United States, the American bishops allowed the option of omitting Ephesians 5.22-24, though this creates a rather odd passage in which husbands are addressed, but not wives. In the new Canadian edition of the lectionary, the Episcopal Commission for Liturgy made the judgment that the passage as a whole with its marriage imagery of the relationship between Christ and the church is important enough that sections should not be omitted; some verses were added (Ephesians 4.32, 5.1-2, 5.21) which place the admonition to wives in a broader context in which all Christians are exhorted to “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

* In a comparable household code in 1 Peter, part of the injunction to slaves is read but without the verses which establish the context and thus the passage becomes a general admonition of all Christians (1 Peter 2: 10b-25; Easter 4 A)
Conclusions

What then do we conclude about how the passages chosen for the Sunday lectionary deal with women? This brief survey has tried to survey the main texts, though clearly not every passage could be examined in detail in this short space. Certainly there is no systematic plot to eliminate women from the lectionary. The congregation on Sunday morning is introduced to a number of biblical women, especially from the gospels, and many of the most negative passages in the bible are not read.

However, there is still much room for improvement and revision. The choice of scripture passages in the lectionary in the Roman tradition is based on a number of principles which need to be held in balance (e.g., a focus on the paschal mystery, use of the "most important" readings on Sundays, the tradition that links certain biblical books to seasons of the church year) and it is not a "given" that every biblical passage about women necessarily belongs in the Sunday lectionary. Perhaps with the experience of twenty years — or fifty years — of using this lectionary, with further research into the diverse lectionary traditions which have been part of the church's life throughout history, and with ever-deepening understanding of and sensitivity to the life of women in society today, we will come to a time when a major revision of the lectionary will be undertaken.

Yet, even within the traditional framework, the lectionary could make room for the stories of more women, especially women of the Old Testament and women who exercised leadership in the early Christian community. Some commentators have suggested that the "texts of terror," 10 biblical stories of violence and abuse of women (for example, Jephthah's daughter, the unnamed concubine of Judges 19) do need to be heard, as readings which give voice to similar stories in the lives of women today. Furthermore, given the well-established principle of not choosing "texts which present real difficulties . . . for pastoral reasons" (Introduction of the Lectionary, n 76), 11 a strong case can be made for the omission to any passages which can serve to reinforce and give scriptural sanction to the subordination of women.

And perhaps, at times, we ask too much of the lectionary. The Sunday readings at Mass can never be the only context in which we experience the bible. There is a real need for small group bible study, catechetical and adult-learning programs to provide an arena for people to explore the full scope of what the bible says about women; here we can bring our own experiences to interact with the text in ways which are not possible within the parameters of the Sunday eucharist.

10 For the term and a collection of biblical stories, see Phyllis Trible, Texts of Terror (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1984)
11 For a study of how this principle is applied in the lectionary as a whole, see Eileen Schuller, "Some Criteria for the Choice of Scripture Texts in the Roman Lectionary," in Peter C. Finn and James M. Schellman, eds., Shaping English Liturgy (Washington: Pastoral Press 1990) 385-404
Introduction

1. Requests for the publication of an edition of the Book of the Gospels in Canada has revealed a trend of increased use at the parish level. This may be due to the publication in some countries of an edition of the Book of the Gospels and to the establishment of the permanent ministry of the diaconate in more dioceses. However, the use of the Book of the Gospels presents some pastoral questions that may not appear obvious at first. The Lectionary is a modern hybrid book which combines both the readings of the Old and New Testament lessons and the gospels. Thus with the use of the Book of the Gospels, it is possible to have two liturgical books, both of which contain the gospels.

2. The use of the Lectionary and the absence of deacons in many places have led to the establishment of liturgical patterns which differ from the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. The General Instruction presumes that the Book of the Gospels will be used in the liturgy. The exclusive use of the Lectionary for many years throughout Canada will require some adjustment in thinking as well as practice, if the Book of the Gospels is introduced.

3. The questions of how to co-ordinate the use of the Lectionary and the Book of the Gospels, which book should be carried in the opening procession, who should carry the Lectionary or the Book of the Gospels, and from what location should the different readings be proclaimed have prompted a request by the National Council of Liturgy that the National Liturgical Office prepare guidelines for the use of the Book of the Gospels. The up-coming publication of the first Canadian edition of the Book of the Gospels presents an opportunity to offer some reflections and to issue guidelines for the use of the Book of the Gospels.

* This document was prepared by the National Liturgical Office

115
Pastoral Reflections

Separate Books for each Ministry

4. Throughout the latter part of the Middle Ages, due to the increased travel of the clergy and monks and to the absence of most liturgical ministers in private celebrations, the process of combining liturgical books and ministries produced the missal of the fourteenth century which contained all the texts proper to the various ministers needed for the celebration of the eucharist. This new missal became the main liturgical book used in most parish churches and established a new pattern of celebration and ministry, even in communal settings. Nevertheless, in the ancient cathedrals, the older books proper to each ministry continued to be used, even though the priest used the new missal at the altar and silently read the sung texts as these were chanted by the choir and the epistle and gospel as the subdeacon and deacon proclaimed these to the liturgical assembly.

5. The renewal of the liturgy by the Second Vatican Council has resulted in the process of restoring the liturgical ministries and of separating liturgical texts into books to be used by the appropriate ministers. Within the Roman tradition this is a restoration of an ancient practice. Today a lector or reader would use the book of the lessons; the psalmist, the psalter or gradual; the deacon, the Book of the Gospels; the priest, the sacramentary. The use of the Book of the Gospels fits into the pattern of each minister using a liturgical book unique to that ministry, and it presumes the presence of all liturgical ministers in the celebration of the Eucharist. Problems will arise when there is an attempt to use all the liturgical books without the corresponding ministers, or when there is a mixing of different liturgical patterns.

6. In the early days of liturgical renewal when liturgical books were being prepared in the vernacular, priority was given to the preparation of the Lectionary and the sacramentary. The absence of deacons, at that time, did not necessitate the division of the Lectionary into separate books for the lessons and the gospels. Thus while the use of the Book of the Gospels is linked to the ministry of the deacon, it cannot be said that the Lectionary belongs exclusively to the ministry of the lector. It contains the scriptural texts for three ministers, the lector, the psalmist and the deacon. Thus the lector continues to use a lectionary that contains the lessons for the first and second readings as well as the gospel pericopes.

7. As a result, it is difficult to emphasize the special dignity of the gospel when both liturgical books in use contain the holy gospels, and it is to be expected that there will be a little confusion concerning the use of the Book of the Gospels and the Lectionary.

Special Dignity of the Gospel

8. The introduction of the Book of the Gospels into the liturgical life of a parish raises the question of the relationship of the gospel to the other readings that precede it. The question of the uniqueness of the gospel is not without its difficulties; for making too great a distinction between the different readings may invite liturgical abuses. Indeed it is necessary to highlight two liturgical principles and traditions that must be delicately balanced: the special dignity associated with the proclamation of
the gospel within the liturgy of the word and the importance and unity of all the readings within the liturgy of the word.

9. The liturgical assembly itself is an original symbol of the presence of Christ, but within the assembly the Book of the Gospels with its solemn entrance became the first object to mirror the presence of Christ to the assembly. It predates the use of the processional cross. In the eighth century, in a solemn procession, the Book of the Gospels was carried into the assembly by an acolyte, who was accompanied by a subdeacon. At the altar the subdeacon reverently took the Book of the Gospels from the acolyte and placed it on the altar. Then, when the bishop entered in a separate procession and came to the altar, he kissed the Book of the Gospels and the altar, before going to the chair. As a later development both were also incensed.

10. In addition to the procession with the Book of the Gospels, the respect for the gospel was elaborated in the rites surrounding the proclamation of the gospel: the ornate decoration of the cover of the *evangelarium*, the use of candles and incense, the singing of the gospel acclamation, the special minister to proclaim the gospel, the signs of the cross, and the posture of the assembly.

One Symbol for the Word of God

11. Following the traditional use of the Book of the Gospels, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states that the Book of the Gospels is carried in the opening procession by a deacon or by a lector or placed on the altar before the celebration begins. Although the Roman tradition provides for separate books for the lessons and the gospel, the symbol of the word of God is primarily the Book of the Gospels. The *General Instruction* avoids any duplication of symbols by directing that the Lectionary be placed on the ambo before the celebration begins.

12. It is only when the Book of the Gospels is not used that the Lectionary may be carried in the entrance procession. The use of the Book of the Gospels along with the Lectionary in parish pastoral practice must also seek to avoid duplication of symbols. Thus when the Book of the Gospels is used, the Lectionary is not carried in the opening procession, but it is placed on the ambo before the celebration begins. When the Book of the Gospels is used, preference should be given to carrying it in the opening procession, rather than placing it on the altar.

Unity of the Liturgy of the Word

13. Today, within the liturgy of the word, the reading of the gospel is still the high point, and thus special reverence and attention is given to the gospel by the rites.

---


2 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (*GIRM*), 79, 82 and 128

3 *GIRM*, 80b
surrounding the procession of the Book of the Gospels and its proclamation. However, the use of the Book of the Gospels should not convey to the people of God that the first and second readings from the Lectionary are of a secondary importance. Thus the Lectionary should always be used by the lector with the dignity proper to the word of God. It should reverently be placed on the ambo before the celebration begins and should likewise be removed from the ambo after the period of silence following the second reading and set in a place of respect. This should be done in a manner that does not draw attention to the Lectionary or resemble a procession.

14. The unity of the liturgy of the word of God is maintained in part by having one location for the proclamation of the word of God. Thus when the General Instruction speaks of the special reverence and attention given to the gospel, it refers primarily to the rites that surround the proclamation of the gospel and not to a different place of proclamation.

15. Throughout most of its history the proclamation of the scriptures was tried to a single, fixed place in the church or presbyterium, called the ambo. The Latin word ambo, derived from Greek use, refers more to an elevated place to which one climbed to proclaim the scriptures, than to an item of furniture, variously called a table, reading desk, lectern, or pulpit that held the book of lessons. In the Roman liturgy, the original and predominate custom was to have one elevated place, from which all the scripture readings were proclaimed. This custom is seen even today in the more ancient and larger basilicas and cathedrals, with their single, fixed ambo, with or without a reading desk.

16. Until the Middle Ages, the only distinction that can be found in the proclamation of the various readings is that the gospel was proclaimed on the top step of the ambo, while the epistle and psalm were sung on a step below the top step. In this earlier period, the ambo was usually located near the choir, between the presbyterium and the nave, on the right side of the sanctuary. In the smaller churches there was no need for an elevated place for the proclamation of the scriptures, since the lector, later the subdeacon, and the deacon had no problem being heard or seen. As churches became longer, the ambo with a reading desk or lectern was moved into the nave of the church so that the reader could be seen and heard; this arrangement developed into the pulpit, but left the presbyterium without an ambo. As time progressed and Latin was no longer the language of the majority of the people, it made no difference whether the lector and deacon could be heard, since no one understood what was being proclaimed. This led to the epistle and gospel being proclaimed from the floor of the presbyterium, and the lessons read from the pulpit a second time in the local language before the sermon was given. In the absence of the lectern, the subdeacon held the book of the lessons for himself as he proclaimed the epistle, and then held the Book of the Gospels for the deacon as the latter proclaimed the gospel.

17. In some places, in the eleventh century, there was felt a need for the ambo in the sanctuary, and there are some references to ambos being placed in the presby-
terium, and in some cases, two, one for the epistle, and a second reading desk for the gospel, usually more ornate in design.

18. Another custom developed in the Middle Ages, that of proclaiming the epistle and gospel from different places in the presbyterium. This took the form of reading the epistle on the opposite side of the chancel or presbyterium than the gospel. At first, all the readings were proclaimed from the same fixed ambo, usually on the right side of the presbyterium. This was based on the ambo's relationship to the cathedra or presidential chair of the bishop, which was located in the centre of the apse of the church, behind the altar. Later, when the chair of the bishop was shifted from its central place behind the altar to the right side of the presbyterium, the altar was pushed back to the wall of the apse. This move obscured the reason for proclaiming the word, including the gospel, on the right-hand-side of the bishop, which was the left side of the chancel or presbyterium. Since the chair of the bishop was usually placed on the right side of the presbyterium, the same side from which the readings were proclaimed, the readings were now proclaimed by ministers with their back to the bishop. This eventually led to the shifting of the proclamation of the gospel to the opposite side of the presbyterium, the left side, in order to partially face the bishop. The epistle continued to be proclaimed from the right side. Thus the epistle and gospel were now proclaimed at opposite sides of the presbyterium: the epistle on the right side and the gospel on the left.

19. This practical rearrangement appeared incomprehensible to later generations and gave rise to allegorical interpretations, which tended to associate the readings to the importance of the minister proclaiming them, distinguish them in an hierarchy of importance based upon their source in the Bible, signify the Old Testament being superseded by the New Testament, or identify the left side with the gospel proclaimed to unbelievers. Such interpretations were naturally false and foreign to the liturgy.

20. Thus the custom of proclaiming the epistle and gospel from different places is a later development, beginning in Gallican regions. One which should not be imitated today. Following the more ancient tradition, the General Instruction directs that churches now employ one fixed table or desk for the proclamation of the word, called the ambo or lectern, and the Introduction to the Lectionary states that all the scriptures are to be proclaimed from the one lectern or ambo.

21. Today, the proclamation of the first two readings in a different place than the gospel may inadvertently and unconsciously (even if unintentional) be interpreted as a difference in importance or significance between the Old Testament readings and the New Testament letters on the one hand, and the gospels on the other. This is a distinction which the liturgy does not make or intend. The same distinctions wrongly might be implied between the different ministers who proclaim the readings and the gospel. The practice of reading the gospel from a separate place, even in

---

8 Jungmann, I, 417-418. See also Klauser, 207. Klauser, quoting a work by A. M. Schneider, "Ambo" in Realexikon für Antike und Christentum I (Stuttgart, 1950) 363-364, says that "the practice of two ambos in somewhat later and always exceptional."
9 Jungmann, I, 415-416
10 Jungmann, I, 413-415
11 Jungmann, I, 432
12 GIRM, 272 and 96; see also 95 and 131
13 IL, 16 and 32
the midst of the assembly or from a separate ambo or lectern than the first two scriptural readings, should be most exceptional.

22. When the custom of proclaiming the gospel in the centre aisle of the Church "in the midst of the assembly" is contemplated for a special occasion, the possibility of proclaiming the whole liturgy of the word "in the midst of the assembly" should be examined.

Ministers of the Word

23. The reading of the word of God properly belongs to the lectors and the deacon: the lectors who proclaim the readings before the gospel and the deacon who proclaims the gospel. A priest, either the presider, or another, reads the gospel only when there is no deacon. The Introduction to the Lectionary encourages the presence of separate lectors for the first and second readings.

24. The General Instruction names the deacon and the reader as the persons who carry the Book of the Gospels in the opening procession. It establishes a preference when it states that the reader carries the Book of the Gospels in the absence of the deacon. Since the deacon is the ordinary minister of the gospel, it is logical that the one who proclaims the gospel should be the minister to carry the Book of the Gospels. However, historical precedence does not necessarily equate the person who carries the book with the person who uses it. The Roman tradition places more emphasis on the proclamation of the gospel and who proclaims it, than on the person who carries the Book of the Gospels.

26. Since the proclamation of the word of God is a ministerial function and not a presidential role, it would be inappropriate, when a deacon is not present, for the presider to carry the Book of the Gospels in the opening procession, even if he is to carry it in the gospel procession and proclaim the gospel. In the opening procession the presider acts in a presidential role. The presider is the first listener of the scriptures, who proclaims the word in the homily after prayerful reflection. The presider is not the ordinary minister of the proclamation of the gospel. The Roman tradition does not record any instance of the presider, or another priest, carrying the Book of the Gospels in the procession.

---

14 GIRM, 34
15 IL, 52
16 GIRM, 82d states that the reader "may carry the Book of the Gospels," while n. 128 says that the deacon, "vested and carrying the Book of the Gospels ... precedes the priest on the way to the altar ... ." N. 148 reads: "In the procession to the altar, when no deacon is present, the reader may carry the Book of the Gospels. In that case he walks in front of the priest ... ." IL 17 refers to the "Book of the Gospels that has been carried in by the deacon or reader during the entrance procession ... ."
17 See paragraph 9 and its note. By the 13th century, it is the subdeacon who holds the Book of the Gospels for the deacon as he proclaims the gospel. The sacramentary used by the priest is never carried by him, but by other ministers who hold it for the prayers at the chair and who place it on the altar at the liturgy of the eucharist.
18 GIRM, 8 and 34
19 See paragraph 9 and its note, which refers to the eighth century practice of a separate procession, before the entry of the bishop, in which an acolyte carried the Book of the Gospels into the presbyterium. References after the eleventh century refer exclusively to the deacon carrying the Book of the Gospels. In the 13th century, a subdeacon holds the Book of the Gospels as the deacon proclaims the gospel.
27. The *General Instruction* provides that in the absence of a deacon, a concelebrating priest may carry out the functions of the deacon. Moreover, it is preferable that a concelebrant or another priest proclaim the gospel rather than the presider, nevertheless, when a deacon is not present, a concelebrant or another priest should not carry the Book of the Gospels in the entrance procession as this is explicitly assigned to the lector by the *General Instruction*.

---

### Ordination Rites

28. In addition to its use at the celebration of the eucharist, the Book of the Gospels is also used in the ordination rites of bishops and deacons.

#### Ordination of a Bishop

29. The first mention of the use of the Book of the Gospels in the ceremonies of the ordination of a bishop is at the end of the fourth century. Evidence indicates that the custom originated in the East in Antioch and Syria. A rubric in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, states that two deacons hold the gospels open on the head of the ordinand while one of the bishops says the prayer of ordination. While the same document mentions the laying on of hands for the ordination of a presbyter, it does not mention this in the case of the ordination of a bishop. The *Apostolic Constitutions* is not the only evidence of the use of the Book of the Gospels in the ordination of a bishop from this period. It is briefly mentioned by Pallidus and more fully by Severian of Gabala. However, it is not until the fifth century, in the writing of Pseudo-Dionysius that there is an explicit reference to both imposition of hands and the Book of the Gospels in the ordination of a bishop.

30. The practice spread to most of the sees of East and West Syria, and Byzantium, except in the patriarchal sees of Alexandria and Rome where it was reserved exclusively for the ordination of the patriarch and the pope. In these two cases the custom may have been adopted from the Syrian practice to avoid the impression that those in the lower rank of the episcopate are conferring the higher office of patriarch or pope.

---

20 *GIRM*, 160  
21 *GIRM*, 34; *IL*, 49  
22 *GIRM*, 66 and 148; *IL*, 17 and 51  
23 *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.4 (ca. 350-400); quoted in Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo Press 1990) 113  
24 *Dialogus Historicus* 16 (*Patrologia Graeca* [PG] 47.53)  
25 *PG* 125.533  
26 Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Eccl. Hier.* 5.3.7  
27 Bradshaw, 40  
28 Bradshaw, 43
31. Due to the strong influence of the Eastern rites upon the Gallican rite, the imposition of the gospel book was used in all episcopal ordinations in the Franco-German dioceses. From there it spread to all other Western dioceses, eventually to Rome itself. Later, the custom of deacons holding the gospel book evolved into two bishops holding the Book of the Gospels. This custom was never adapted in Rome. In Gaul the book was left closed, and this custom was used in all Western rites, except in the Roman.

32. The meaning of the imposition of the gospel book varies from author to author: either as a sign of the descent of the Holy Spirit, the yoke of the gospel, the sacred words and works of the bishop to proclaim the gospel, or submission of episcopal ministry to the law of God. The variety of interpretations indicates an attempt to give meaning to an ancient ceremony whose original purpose already had been forgotten. It would appear that the imposition of the Book of the Gospels is a more ancient rite predating the end of the fourth century. While its origin remains unknown, some have speculated that it may be a substitution for the laying on of hands, resolving some disagreement over who had the right to lay on hands in the ordination of a local bishop, whether itinerant prophets, or the local, or visiting clergy, or the local presbyters or visiting bishops. A resolution might have been to use the gospel book as a symbol that Christ himself was the agent of ordination of a bishop.

33. Whatever its origin, if the imposition of the Book of the Gospels was introduced as a substitution for the imposition of hands, it soon became a supplemental rite to the imposition of hands. As mentioned above, by the fifth century, most writers record both rites. It may be that the ancient symbolism of the imposition of hands could not be forgotten or was re-enforced by scriptural references at a time when scriptural images and typology were being added to the ordination prayers. In the West, the Book of the Gospels continues to be held by deacons, while in the East, the tradition of bishops holding the gospel book prevails.

Ordination of Deacons

34. Beyond the laying on of hands and the prayer of ordination, the early patristic sources make no mention of any additional rites in the ordination of bishops, presbyters and deacons. Later sources mention the kiss of peace and the bestowal of symbols of office. The latter were characteristic of the minor orders, but gradually a mutual borrowing led to the introduction of the giving of symbols of office into the rites of the major orders. This part of the rite gradually became elaborated in the Eastern and Gallican rites. The Roman rite first records the vesting of deacons in stole and dalmatic and the kiss of peace, but later, probably due to Gallican influence, the custom of handing over of the Book of the Gospels was added to the rite.

---

30 Severian of Gabala, see note 25
31 Byzantine rite
32 Pseudo-Dionysius, De Eccl. Hier. 5.3.7
33 John Chrysostom, De legislatore (PG 56.404)
34 Bradshaw, 40
35 Bradshaw, 41-43
35. So strong was the custom of handing over of the symbols of office that in later theological interpretations, it was regarded by some schools of theology as the essential matter of the rite of ordination. The question was settled only in 1947, when Pius XII, in the Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum ordinis*, declared that the laying on of hands was henceforth the matter of the orders for the episcopacy, the presbyterate and diaconate.36

36. In the revision of ordination rites for the diaconate, following the Second Vatican Council, the presentation of the Book of the Gospels was retained along with the investiture with stole and dalmatic and the kiss of peace as supplemental rites.

---

**Procedure**

**Preparations**

37. By tradition the Book of the Gospels is associated with the ministry of the deacon, who is the ordinary minister of proclaiming the gospel.37

38. When the Book of the Gospels is used, it is either carried in the opening procession,38 or it is placed on the altar before the celebration begins.39

39. Whenever the Book of the Gospels is used in any celebration, whether it is carried in the opening procession or not, the Lectionary always is placed at the ambo (lectern) before the celebration begins, and is not carried in the opening procession.

**Introductory Rites**

40. In the opening procession, the Book of the Gospels is carried by a deacon, or by a reader when a deacon is not present.40

41. The deacon or reader who carries the Book of the Gospels in the procession lays the Book of the Gospels on the altar.41 When the Book of the Gospels is laid on the altar, it is placed flat and remains closed. When kissing and incensing the altar, the presider also kisses the Book of the Gospels and incenses it.42

**Liturgy of the Word**

42. Following a time of silence after the second reading, the lector removes the Lectionary from the ambo and sets it in an appropriate place of respect.

---


37 *GIRM*, 35 and 61; *IL*, 49, 50

38 *GIRM*, 82 and 128

39 *GIRM*, 79

40 *GIRM*, 82d and 128; *IL* 17

41 *GIRM*, 82 and 64; *IL* 17

42 *GIRM*, 232
43. If incense is to be used, then during the singing of the gospel acclamation the presider places incense in the thurible. A deacon, who is to read the gospel, bows in front of the presider to ask for a blessing. The deacon goes to the altar, takes the Book of the Gospels and then proceeds to the ambo. The servers, carrying candles, and incense when it is used, precede the deacon.

44. When there is no deacon present, the presider, or preferably, a concelebrant or another priest, if one is present, reads the gospel. After the time of silence following the second reading, and, if incense is to be used, then after the presider has placed incense in the thurible, the priest goes to the altar, takes the Book of the Gospels and proceeds to the ambo in procession, preceded by the servers with candles (and incense).

45. The gospel procession should be of sufficient duration and dignity to be a fitting rite and symbol of the reverence the Church shows to the proclamation of the gospel: the singing of the gospel acclamation, the carrying of candles (and incense) by ministers should accompany the procession to the ambo. Moreover, the procession should be clearly visible to the assembly.

46. The gospel should be proclaimed from the same ambo or place from which the first and second readings were proclaimed.

Concluding Rite

47. When the Book of the Gospels is carried in the opening procession, it is carried out in the concluding procession by the same minister who carried it at the beginning of the celebration.

Pastoral Guidelines

48. In Canada, the Lectionary, containing both the lessons and gospels, should be the preferred book of the scriptures used at the parish celebration of the Sunday Eucharist, especially when there is no deacon to exercise the ministry of proclaiming the gospel.

49. In places where deacons exercise their ministry, the Book of the Gospels should be used only when there is the regular and consistent presence of a deacon at the parish celebration in order to ensure a uniform and harmonious pattern of worship for the community and for those who exercise the various ministries, especially the readers.

At a concelebrated Mass, in the absence of a deacon, a concelebrating presbyter proclaims the gospel and carries the Book of the Gospels in the procession to the ambo. (GIRM, 6, 160)

GIRM, 131; IL, 17
GIRM, 93-94 and 131
GIRM, 160
GIRM, 94-96, 272; IL, 16-17, 32
50. When the Book of the Gospels is used, preference should be given to carrying it in the opening procession rather than placing it on the altar before the celebration begins.

51. The duplication of symbols for the Word of God must be avoided. When the Lectionary is carried in the opening procession, the Book of the Gospels is not used. When the Book of the Gospels is carried in procession, the Lectionary is placed on the ambo before the celebration begins.

52. When the Book of the Gospels is used, a reader removes it from the ambo after the silence following the second reading and sets it in a place of honour. This should be done in a manner that does not draw attention to the Lectionary or resemble a procession. Nor should the Lectionary be put in a place for public display to the assembly during the celebration.

53. The deacon, or in his absence, the lector is the proper minister to carry the Book of the Gospels in the opening procession and place it on the altar.

54. Even when the deacon carries the Book of the Gospels in the opening procession, it is advisable that the lectors still should enter in the procession with the other ministers to reflect the body of Christ and the complementarity of all ministries in the eucharist.

55. In the Roman tradition, when the Book of the Gospels is placed on the altar, it lies flat and remains closed.

56. The use of the Book of the Gospels must be accompanied by suitable solemnity. At the proclamation of the gospel, the singing of the gospel acclamation must be sufficiently long to accompany the procession to the ambo. In addition, the procession from the altar to the ambo should be substantial enough to be an adequate and visible symbol to the assembly. Candles and incense, carried by ministers, precede the minister who carries the Book of the Gospels. After the proclamation of the gospel, the Book of the Gospels normally remains at the ambo.

57. The unity of the liturgy of the word of God and the importance of all God's Word should be evident by proclaiming all the scriptural readings from one location, preferably the ambo. The gospel is not to be proclaimed from a different place than the readings which precede it.

58. The Book of the Gospels is more properly used at the ordination of bishops and deacons than the Lectionary for the proclamation of the gospel, for the imposition during the prayer of consecration of a bishop and for the presentation of the gospels in the ordination of deacons.\footnote{IL, 36}
The Apostles’ Creed

In its publication, Praying Together, the English Language Liturgical Consultation has provided helpful notes on the texts of many commonly used liturgical texts. Here we print the notes on the text of the Apostles’ Creed. From PRAYING TOGETHER. Copyright © 1988 by the English Language Liturgical Consultation. Excerpted by permission of the publisher, Abingdon Press.

This concludes our series of excerpts from Praying Together.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, 
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, 
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, 
born of the Virgin Mary, 
suffered under Pontius Pilate, 
was crucified, died, and was buried; 
he descended to the dead. 
On the third day he rose again; 
he ascended into heaven, 
he is seated at the right hand of the Father, 
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, 
the holy catholic church, 
the communion of saints, 
the forgiveness of sins, 
the resurrection of the body, 
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Apostles’ Creed in its present form dates back to a Latin text of the eighth century, but it clearly incorporates far older material. For the great variety of early texts, East and West, see Denzinger-Schonmetzer, editio XXXVI, nos. 1-76. In origin, this Creed appears to have developed from a threefold questioning at baptism, probably based on the Lord’s command in Matthew 28.19. The candidates were asked successively whether they believed in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. To each question the candidate, standing in the water, replied “I believe” and was three times immersed, once after each answer. At least as early as the fourth century, the candidates were also taught a fuller profession of faith in the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. This took varying forms in different places. In Rome the local form developed

1 (Nashville: Abingdon 1988) 29-32. All footnotes are the work of the Editor.

2 Excerpts previously published include:
into what became known as "The Apostles' Creed" – not because the Apostles wrote it, but because it was taken to represent the authentic apostolic tradition.

The primary association of the Apostles Creed with a personal profession of faith at baptism explains the singular pronoun "I" at the beginning. Because this Creed is also used in such corporate services as Morning and Evening Prayer, and sometimes in place of the Nicene Creed at the Eucharist, the Consultation has included a final "Amen" and approves of the substitution, where desired, of the first-person plural at the beginning of each paragraph, for example, "We believe in God, the Father almighty . . . ."

**Line 2.** "creator." This is a translation of the Latin creatorem, in contrast to "maker" (Greek poieten, Latin factorem) in the Nicene Creed. For the sake of accuracy, it was thought the wording of the two Creeds should be kept distinct. "Creator" also has the advantage of suggesting that God did not make the universe out of pre-existing material but is the origin of all things.

**Line 3.** Although the words "I believe" are not repeated in the original at lines 3 and 13, they are clearly understood with each of the parts of the Creed. Their repetition brings out the basic structure when the Creed is recited. For "God's" see the notes on the Gloria in Excelsis, lines 1, 2 and 4 and the explanation of the second guideline for the revision of the ICET texts (Introduction, p. 7).

**Line 4.** Two changes have been made to the 1975 ICET version of this line. The phrase "by the power of the Holy Spirit" was changed back to an older, simpler, and more literal form "by the Holy Spirit." The reference to "power," which is not found in the Latin form, was added originally to the ICET translation to dispel any mistaken notion of sexual activity. Unfortunately, this introduced the possibility of a different misunderstanding, that is, that the Spirit was so powerful that Mary's free consent was not necessary.

At the beginning of the line, it was decided to restore the relative pronoun "who" rather than present the Creed as a series of separate statements. This has led to consequential changes in lines 5 and 6.

**Line 7.** "died." The ICET version with an active verb has been retained here, though some would have preferred the finality of the traditional "dead and buried." The decision hinged on whether the next line ended with "dead" or "hell."

**Line 8.** The problem in translating descendit ad inferna (literally, "he went down to the lower regions") was whether the traditional rendering "into hell" should be restored, and, if so, what it would imply to a modern congregation. It represents Sheol and has little or nothing to do with Gehenna, a place of eternal punishment and separation from God, which "hell" is generally understood to mean. The line has been subject to various interpretations. Some have understood it as emphasizing the reality of the Lord's death in the previous line. Others have seen it as stating that Jesus entered into the lowest depth of our human condition - a sense of abandonment by God. Others, following 1 Peter 3.19, have thought of it as beginning the resurrection sequence, with our Lord proclaiming his victory to the souls of the departed. Still

---

3 In the Anglican tradition.
4 See note 2, above.
5 This reads, "Sensitivity should be shown to the need for inclusive language."
4 ICET stands for International Consultation on English Texts, the organization that preceded the English Language Liturgical Consultation. It published earlier ecumenically agreed on versions of the Apostles' Creed and similar texts.
others have thought of our Lord going to do battle with Satan, thus guaranteeing the deliverance of the saints. Some Churches have officially adopted one of the foregoing interpretations. The Consultation has attempted to provide a text which is open to all four. It believed, however, that the ICET punctuation which made the line a separate assertion, connecting it neither with line 7 nor with line 9, gave undue prominence to the line. The Consultation noted that all the common interpretations had to do with the departed or with a sense of spiritual death, and that some later texts read *ad inferos* “to those below.” While aware that some would have preferred “into hell,” the Consultation believed that “to the dead” was the least misleading version and that it allowed the same breadth of interpretation as the original. The notion of descent has been retained, since it is part of the symbolic language based on the picture of the universe which the Creed assumes.

**Line 9.** “he rose again.” The active voice “he rose” is retained as an accurate translation of the Latin *resurrexit*. The “again” is simply an English idiom corresponding to the Latin prefix *re-*. It does not imply repetition, but restoration. Compare: “he fell over but quickly got up again.” While admitting that this traditional form has confused some, the Consultation found that the line seemed incomplete if “again” was omitted. The words “from the dead” have been omitted because of the translation of *inferna* as “the dead” in line 8.

**Line 10.** “ascended.” This is retained for the sake of the symbolic language, and because it corresponds to the biblical picture presented in Luke 24.51; Acts 1.3; Ephesians 4.10. Further, the Ascension of our Lord has a prominent place in the Church’s calendar.

**Lines 11 and 12.** As with lines 4-7, these lines have been more closely linked than in the ICET version. This not only makes the lines easier to say but also corresponds more closely to the original.

**Line 11.** “the Father.” Repetition of the first line’s “God, the Father almighty” would make this line unnecessarily heavy, and so the Consultation has followed the Nicene Creed at this point.

**Line 12.** “and he will come to judge.” The “again” of the ICET version has been dropped since there is nothing corresponding to it in the original Latin, like line 23 of the Nicene Creed.

**Line 14.** “catholic.” With its emphasis upon wholeness, this word is richer than any suggested substitute, for example, “universal.” Just as the Latin Church judged the Greek term indispensable, so “catholic” has been the common usage of the majority of English-speaking Churches. 7

**Line 15.** “communion of saints.” The Latin *sanctorum communio* could be translated either a fellowship of holy people or a participation in holy things, for example, the sacraments. Though there are some strong arguments in favor of the latter interpretation, there is no adequate reason for abandoning the traditional rendering. Moreover, no adequate expression for “holy things” has been forthcoming.

**Line 17.** The traditional rendering “resurrection of the body” was considered the most adequate way of expressing the totality of the resurrection implied by the Latin phrase *canis resurrectionem* (literally “resurrection of the flesh”).

7 In liturgical books of the Roman Catholic Church, the word “catholic” usually is printed with a lower-case “c” when the meaning is “universal” rather than this particular church. It is printed with an upper-case “C” in the rite of Reception of Baptized Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church, when the meaning has to do with this church.
CATHOLIC BOOK OF WORSHIP III

The Official Hymnal for Canadian Catholics

a comprehensive resource incorporating quality selections from all styles of music-making

695 Entries: 404 Hymns and Canticles, plus Psalms and Acclamations

CHOIR EDITION (available now)

- 4 part harmony for hymns - indicated by using SATB stems
- organ accompaniment and guitar chords for all hymns, psalms and canticles
- refrains, psalm-tones and texts pointed for all Sunday responsorial psalms (with organ and guitar accompaniment)
- hymns intended to be sung in unison indicated by:
  a) a separate melody line OR
  b) melody stemmed separately from the keyboard accompaniment
- descants provided, may be used by voice or instrument
- improved indices: Refrain Index, Scriptural Index, Author/Translator/Composer/Arranger/Source Index, Metrical Index, Tune Index, Liturgical and Topical Index, Title and First Line Index
- all verses of hymns printed directly under the music

1280 pages, 15 x 23 cm., sewn, hard cover, gold imprint:
$40.39 ($34.95 + shipping & handling + GST)

PEW EDITION will be available later in 1994, at the price of $23.05 ($19.95 + shipping & handling + GST).

EASY PAYMENT PLAN AVAILABLE FOR ORDERS OF 50 COPIES OR MORE
(not applicable to discounted orders)

Place your order with:
Publications Service (CCCB)
90 Parent Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 7B1

Telephone (613) 241-7538
Fax (613) 241-5090

TOLL FREE (in Canada) 1-800-769-1147

ALSO AVAILABLE IN BOOKSTORES